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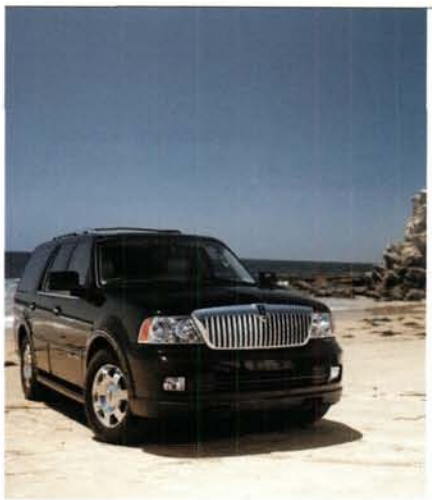

With its bold form, available power liftgate and top-shelf audio system, recording artists as well as roadies are fans of the Lincoln Navigator.

It took 20 years before Bob Taylor, the guru of guitars, actually liked the instruments he labored over. His passion for guitars, ignited in high school, drove Taylor to hone and refine his handmade guitars to a distinctive sound. Today, Taylor guitars are the prized possessions of rock star legends and spotlight wannabes.

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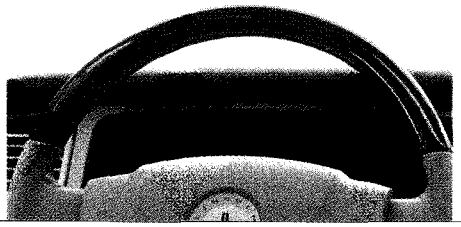
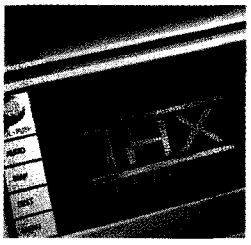
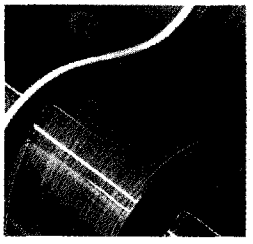


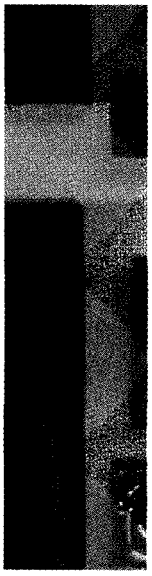
Bob Taylor,
Co-founder of Taylor Guitars

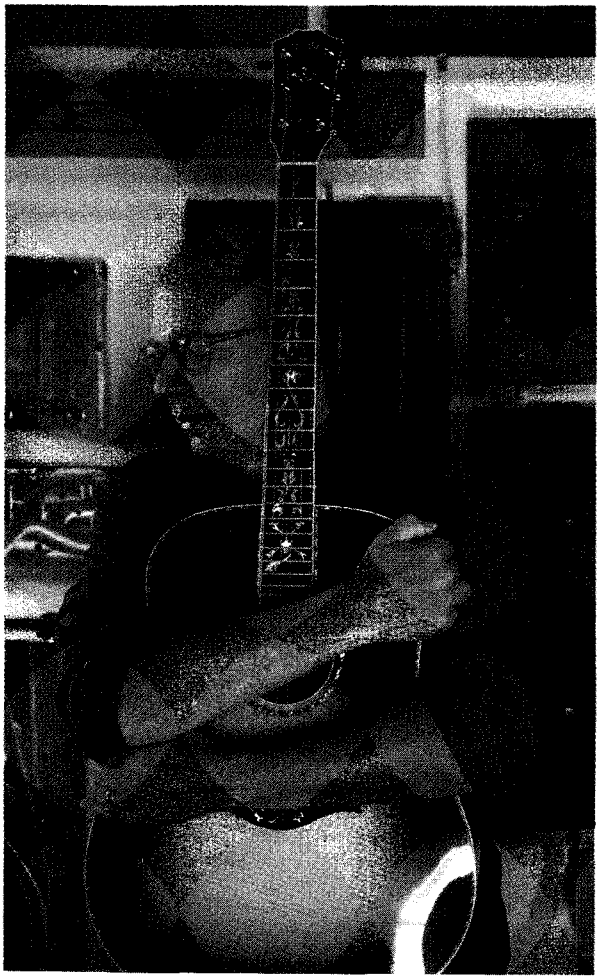
Taylor began using walnut in his guitars back in the '70s for its beauty. Another place where walnut is at home: the Navigator.

A self-dubbed "audio nut," Taylor installed THX® Certified Audio in his home theater. Another detail also available in the Navigator.









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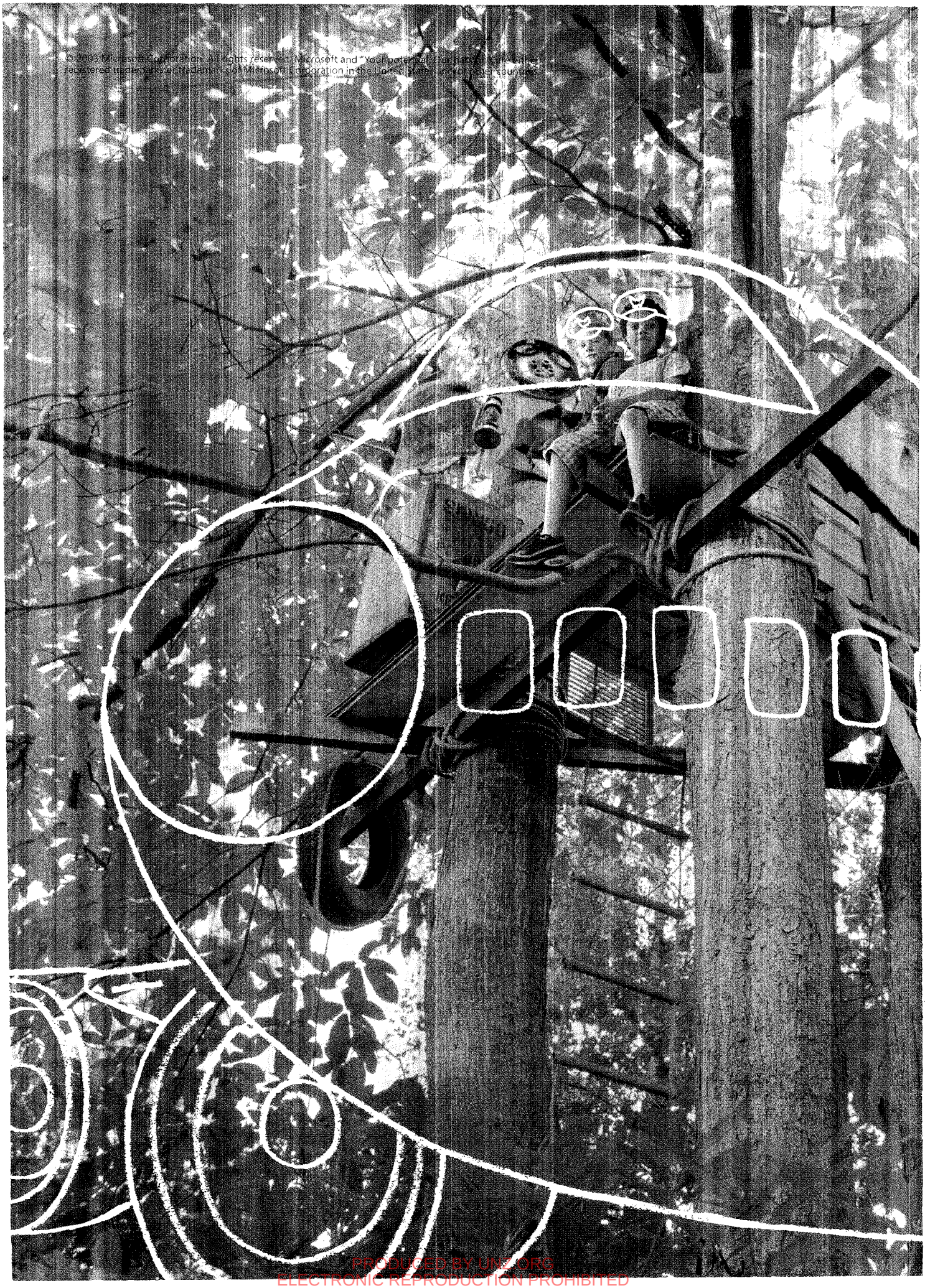

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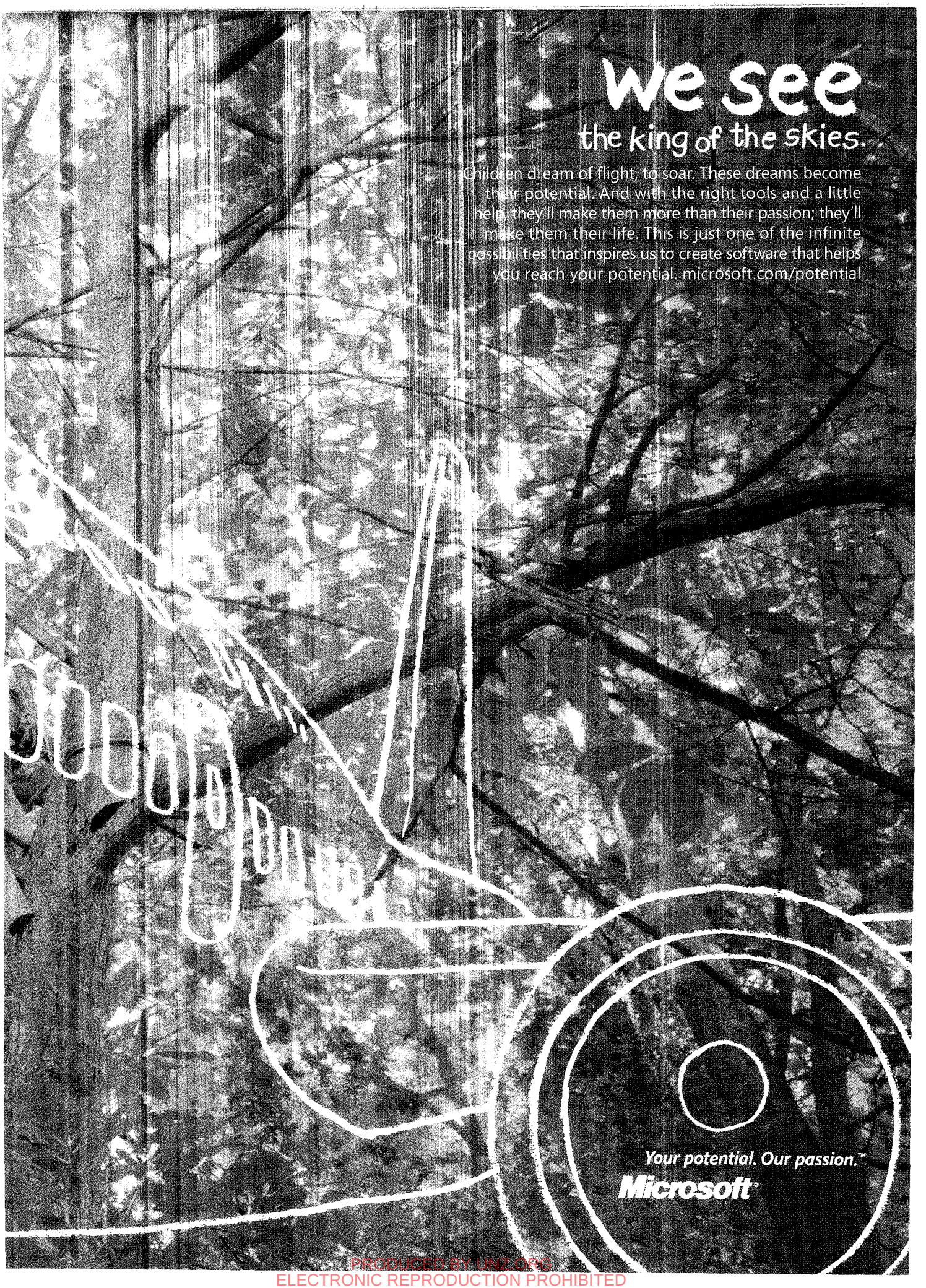


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**Peter Davison (1928–2004)**

Browse a comprehensive collection of his poems and essays, with an introduction by his friend and *Atlantic* colleague David Barber.

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APRIL 2005



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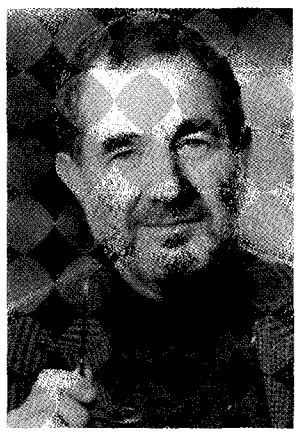
THERE IS AN indispensable kind of person who cuts a swath in the world not merely because of his own accomplishments, which may be considerable, but also because of what he has enabled others to accomplish. This kind of person brings energy and direction to a community, and helps define the experience of living in a particular place and time.

*The Atlantic* lost such a person late last year, with the death of the poet, essayist, teacher, lecturer, editor, and publisher Peter Davison. Peter, who was the poetry editor of this magazine for thirty years, would have been the last to regard himself as indispensable—indeed, the evanescence of indispensability was the sort of irony he relished. (It was Peter, strolling one day through Copp's Hill Burying Ground, in Boston, who introduced me to De Gaulle's famous remark about how the cemeteries are filled with indispensable people.) But for half a century, through force of pen and personality, he was, in his own way, indispensable.



*Peter Davison (1928–2004)*

Peter settled in Boston in 1955, at the age of twenty-seven. He was lured by a job at Harvard University Press, and quickly went on to a distinguished publishing career at the Atlantic Monthly Press and at Houghton Mifflin. The Boston where Peter took root, he would later recall, was "one of the most exciting milieux for poetry in the history of this country," and his circle in those early years included Robert Lowell and Robert Frost, Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath, Richard Wilbur and Donald Hall. It is a world that lives on in verse, and in Peter's 1994 book *The Fading Smile*, a collection of sharp literary sketches that is also part memoir and part anthology (and, in the bargain, one of the best introductions to how poetry is made and why it matters).

Peter's own poetic instincts would steadily mature, leading to the selection of his *The Breaking of the Day* as the Yale Series of Younger Poets volume in 1963. For Peter, poetry was both urgent and personal; he would cite his friend Robert Penn Warren, who wrote that poetry "can help us ponder on what Saint Augustine meant when he said that he was a question to himself." Peter's poetry was not the captive of any one "school" or any one style or any one theme. It blended real feeling and real intellect, and it took up the real questions all of us do—about memory, about transience, about the exquisite life of the senses. Opening one of his books was like opening the door to a friend. (A collection of Peter's poetry, read aloud by Peter himself, can be found on *The Atlantic*'s Web site; his "To the Future" appears on page 84 of this issue.)

Peter was intensely serious about the power of language. He detested the retreat of so much modern poetry into the conjuring of fleeting or trivial experience. Where was the engagement with ideas and events that truly matter? Where were poems like Robert Lowell's "For the Union Dead"? He also believed, more generally, that public writing had become too much the stuff of nouns, commodified and inert, and not enough the stuff of verbs—and that even the verbs too often consisted of "is" and "was." One day he seized some poor writer's galley proof and with a thick black pen circled every "is"; the result looked like target practice. The verb "to die," Peter once said, has a lot more life packed into it than "to be" ever will. You don't really know what you're trying to say, he would advise, unless you know what the verbs are.

Peter himself was a verb, Anglo-Saxon more than Latinate, usually in the active voice, and decidedly transitive. He spent most of his career in service to the writing of others—he was an editor of great skill and no small commercial instinct. In the kitchen of Peter's Boston home hangs a print presented to him by colleagues at Houghton Mifflin—it displays the spines of some of the best-known books he published during his last decade as an editor (books such as Diane Middlebrook's *Anne Sexton*, Robert Coles's *The Spiritual Life of Children*, William Least Heat-Moon's *Blue Highways*, Elizabeth Marshall Thomas's *The Hidden Life of Dogs*). The fruits of Peter's midwifery touch every genre. Consider some of his other authors: Carl Jung, Stanley Kunitz, Frances Fitzgerald, Farley Mowat, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, George F. Kennan, Agnes de Mille. Peter delivered hundreds of people into careers, and millions of words into print.

Peter was a singer, like his father, and an amateur actor, and his often theatrical sociability served as a glue uniting people of many stripes. His stocks of memorized poetry were immense, and he was prone to honor any encounter, from an august ceremonial occasion to a chance meeting, with a pertinent verse or couplet. I remember him one day hurrying off on some small errand after grandly intoning a few lines from Blake: "Great things are done when men and mountains meet; / This is not done by jostling in the street." Not the usual parting comment. To be around Peter was to have your own poet laureate.

A few days before he died, Peter was up in the third-floor workspace at his home, editing a collection of his essays for publication. He didn't have a good title for it yet, he said, handing over a sheet of paper on which was the table of contents. I looked down the list, remembering a lot of these strong, sensual pieces about poetry and books and travel. One of them had a title that caught the eye: "Ringing True." If it doesn't work for the collection, it can still serve for a life. —*CULLEN MURPHY*



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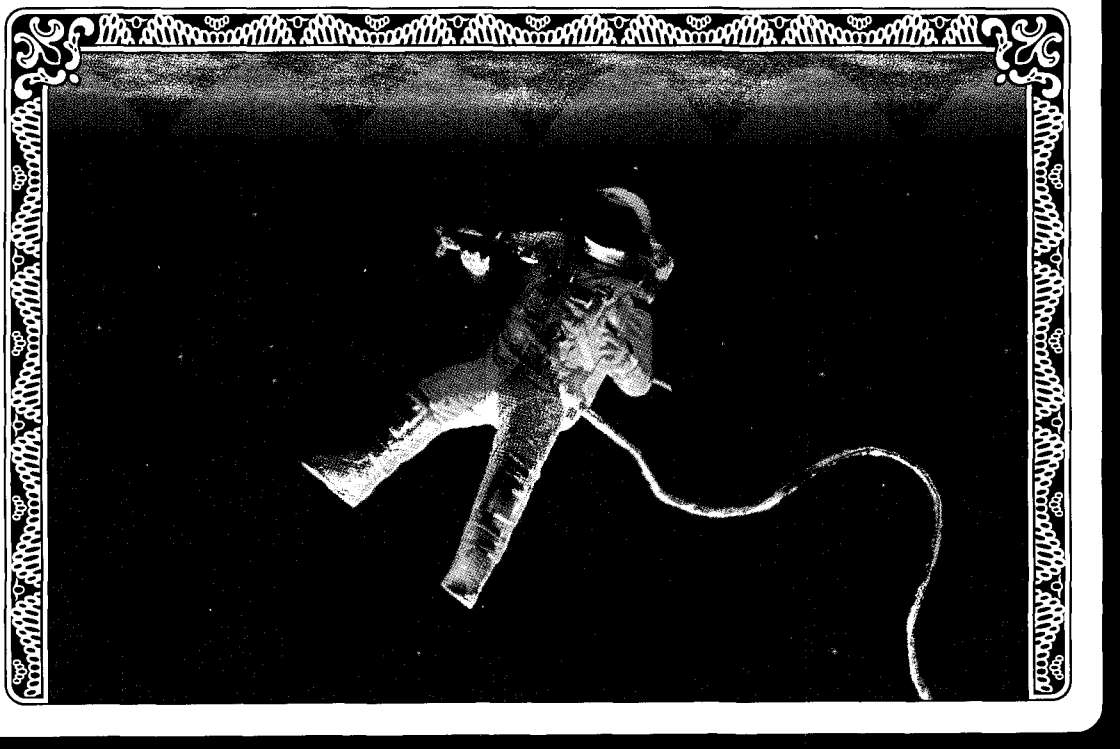

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# CALENDAR

WHAT TO WATCH FOR IN THE WEEKS AHEAD

APRIL 5

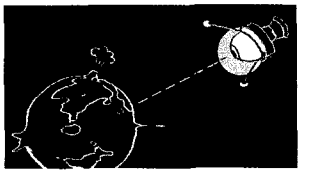
## Iraq War Fragging Trial

In the first instance since the Vietnam era that an American soldier has been tried for the wartime murder of a fellow GI, Army Sergeant Hasan Akbar faces court-martial today for a 2003 pre-dawn grenade-and-rifle attack on soldiers sleeping in their tents, which killed two and injured fourteen just hours before they were to march into Iraq. The defense team for Akbar, a Muslim, is expected to portray the Army as rife with anti-Islamic bias, whereby slurs ("raghead," "habib") and jokes about raping Muslim women are commonplace. Akbar could be sentenced to death.

APRIL 11

## A Kinder, Firmer Implant?

With sheaves of new evidence refuting theories linking silicone breast implants to both cancer and lupus, the California company Inamed will petition the FDA today to end its ban on the implants, which have been restricted to reconstructive surgeries since 1992. Inamed touts its "cohesive silicone" implants as leakproof and just as safe as—but less sloshy than—the saline implants currently available.



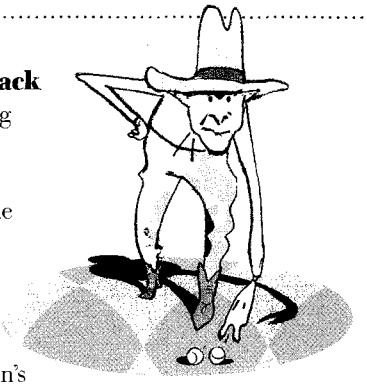
APRIL 15

## Italian Earthquake Clairvoyance

Today an Italian astronaut arrives at the International Space Station to flick on a first-of-its-kind satellite, the LAZIO, which its designers claim can predict earthquake tremors four or five hours before they happen. By picking up telltale fluctuations in radiation belts surrounding Earth, the technology (if it works) should fulfill the long-standing need for a space-based early-warning system to detect earthquakes like the one that caused December's devastating tsunami. The LAZIO's designers caution that the "jewel of Italian technology" will only test a hypothesis about earthquake detection; initial results are due in about seven months.

APRIL 14

## Beltway Baseball Is Back

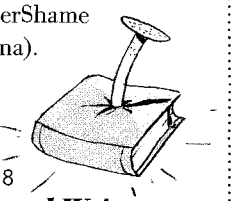


Play ball! After overcoming territorial team owners, rival cities, and a bottom-of-the-ninth battle with the District of Columbia City Council, the Washington Nationals (né Montreal Expos) finally made it to the nation's capital, ending a thirty-three-year hiatus in D.C. baseball. President Bush has accepted the Nationals' invitation to throw out the first pitch—a tradition started by William Howard Taft at a game between the original Nationals (motto: "First in war, first in peace, last in the American League") and the Philadelphia Athletics on this same date in 1910.

APRIL 15

## Pay Taxes—or Else!

State and federal income taxes are due today: time to pay up, file for an extension, or join the millions of delinquent taxpayers increasingly targeted by state and federal government. Last year, in an effort to crack down on scofflaws, Congress approved a plan, strongly supported by President Bush, that allows the IRS to outsource delinquent taxpayer accounts to private debt collectors. Many states are taking a different tack: trying to shame people into paying back taxes by posting their names on such Web sites as Debtor's Corner (South Carolina), DelinqNet (Minnesota), and CyberShame (Louisiana).



APRIL 18

## Sanctioned Writers Publish Freely

Even after 9/11 it seemed odd: the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control forbade U.S. publishers without a license from printing, or even editing, manuscripts by authors from "sanctioned nations"—all part of the government's embargo against such countries as Cuba, Sudan, and Iran. Violators faced fines of up to $1 million and up to ten years in jail, which had the perverse effect of thwarting foreign dissidents who wished to publish in the United States. To challenge the ban, a group of publishers—joined by Salman Rushdie and Shirin Ebadi, the Iranian human-rights activist and 2003 Nobel Peace Prize winner—brought suit. Late last year Treasury relented; it will *not* swoop in to confiscate copies of *Strange Times, My Dear: The PEN Anthology of Contemporary Iranian Literature*, published today.

APRIL 29

## File-Sharing Felons

Today the federal government adds some teeth to the entertainment industry's effort to stop piracy when the United States District Court in Washington, D.C., hands down the first criminal sentences for illegal online file sharing. In January, William R. Trowbridge and Michael Chicoine pleaded guilty to felony copyright infringement for running two hubs of the members-only Underground Network, which, unlike more-popular file-sharing services such as Kazaa and LimeWire, required members to contribute material in order to participate. In a sting called Operation Digital Gridlock federal agents downloaded more than 100 copyrighted works—which they claim are worth more than $25,000—from Trowbridge and Chicoine's two hubs. The defendants face up to $250,000 in fines, up to five years in prison, the forced destruction of their equipment and bootleg recordings, and restitution to the victimized copyright holders. —*MATTHEW QUIRK*



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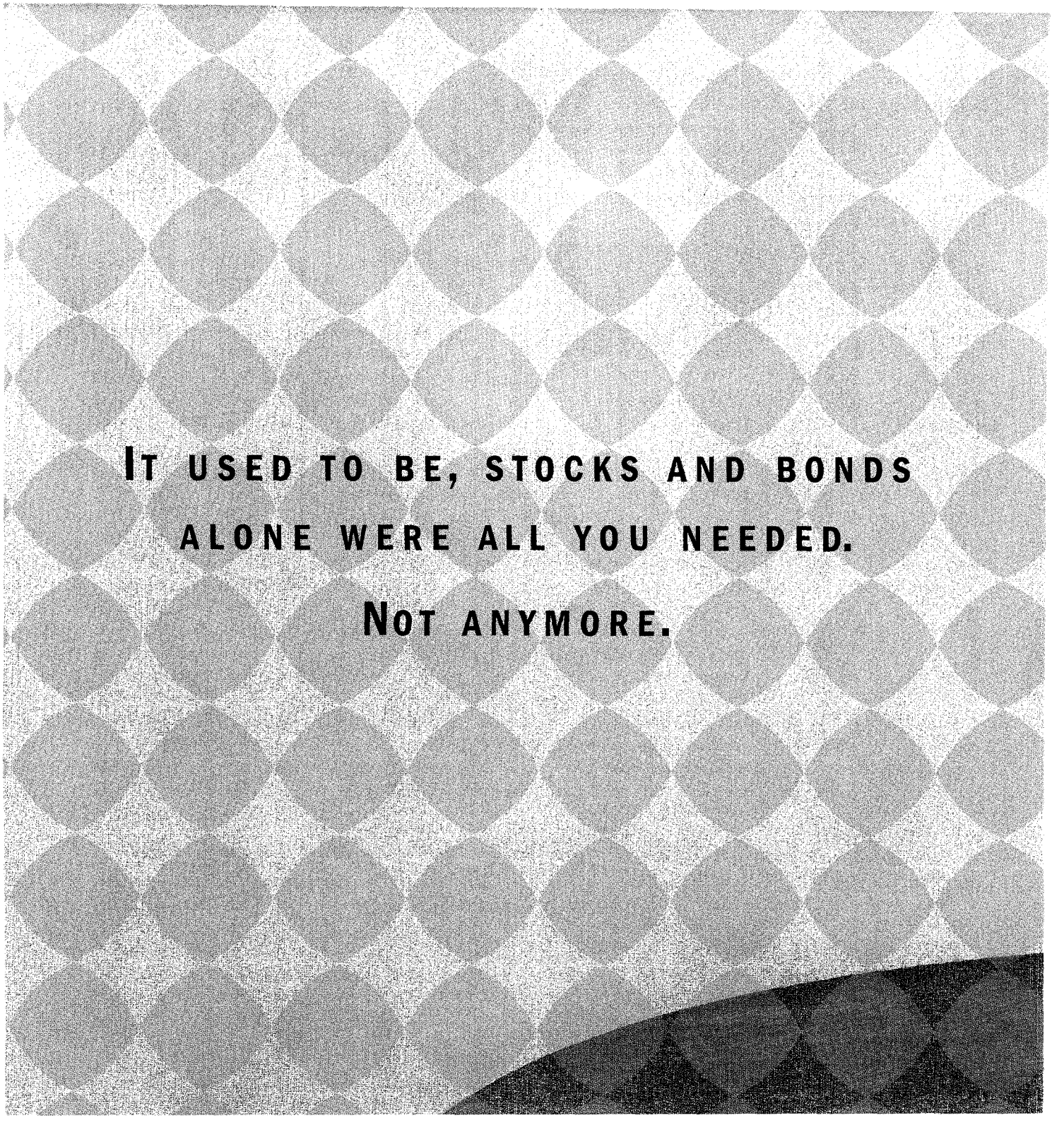


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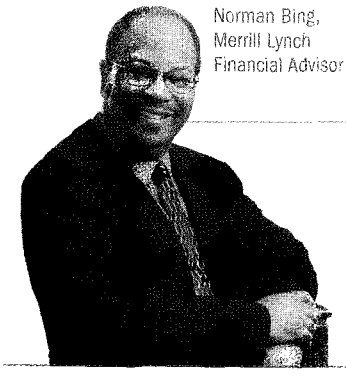
**Li Mei Chan & her son Michael**



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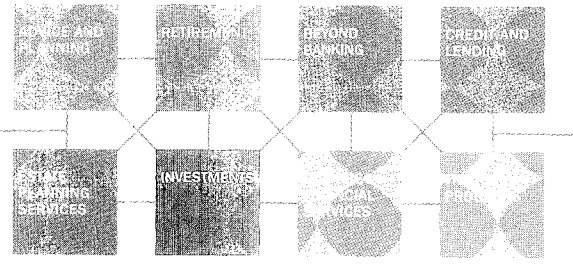


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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Letting Go of *Roe*

In "Letting Go of *Roe*" (January/February *Atlantic*), Benjamin Wittes asserts that "in Gallup polling since 1975 ... about 80 percent of respondents have consistently favored either legal abortion in all circumstances (21 to 34 percent) or legal abortion under some circumstances (48 to 61 percent)." He argues that if the legality of abortion becomes a legislative issue, public opinion will continue to favor pro-choice voters.

However, relying on poll data as reassurance that most states will not outlaw abortion is extremely dangerous. Responses to current polls are based on the presupposition that the legality of choice is mandated by the Supreme Court. To put it simply, Americans respond to the "framing" of issues by "elites"—public figures whose discourse shapes the way in which average people see things. Elite discourse about abortion now occurs in the context of debate about the degree to which abortion should be allowed, generally accepting that it should be allowed at least sometimes.

If *Roe* were reversed, the entire frame of elite discourse would be shifted, presuppositions would be challenged, and poll results would very likely reflect these changes. Though measures of public opinion show us now that most people are pro-choice, we cannot predict how these measures would shift in the face of an event as profound as the end of *Roe*. It's possible that polls would show less support for choice, and that politicians would respond to this decrease; the legislative consequences could be devastating.

Betting the future of a woman's right to choose on polls is not a risk I am willing to take.

*Ryder Kessler*
*Cambridge, Mass.*

***Benjamin Wittes replies:***

*Ryder Kessler is certainly correct that one cannot know what the end of* Roe *would do to public opinion on abortion. My guess on that subject is indeed just a guess. And many pro-choice voters will doubtless share the sentiment that wagering the right to choose on such an unpredictable instrument as democratic government is too dangerous to be seriously entertained. I ask only one thing of liberals who take this position: that they grapple seriously with* Roe*'s costs—the costs to liberalism of fueling a permanently energized pro-life constituency that can be neither politically satisfied nor politically defeated; the costs to the courts of having the judicial-nomination process dominated by an issue so marginal to the judicial function; and the costs to democracy of removing from the policy arena a question close to the hearts of so many voters with so little constitutional warrant. I believe that if more pro-choice voters considered* Roe*'s costs seriously, the currently powerful instinct to defend the decision would wilt.*

## What Amy Would Do

I just finished reading "What Amy Would Do," by Sridhar Pappu (January/February *Atlantic*), and was stunned to see the following sentence regarding Ann Landers: "When she did stop in, former colleagues have said, she was sometimes volatile and intemperate to those around her."

I was Eppie Lederer's right arm for more than thirty years. She rarely came to the office, because she was a night owl, often working until 3:00 A.M. and sleeping past noon. Since her staff left at 5:00 P.M., the trip seemed hardly worth the effort. On those infrequent occasions when she came to the *Tribune*, she was accompanied by her driver or one of her assistants. If she had ever been "volatile" or "intemperate," I would have witnessed it or heard about it. Eppie was unfailingly kind and gracious, even to complete strangers. The only possible basis for this comment might be that Eppie was deaf in her right ear, and may have inadvertently ignored someone who spoke to her from that side.

Attaching the words "volatile" and "intemperate" to Eppie is the greatest fabrication since "once size fits all."

*Kathy Mitchell*
*Chicago, Ill.*

Sridhar Pappu's article prompted me to wonder: Will Amy Dickinson ever have a piece written about her that does not involve the name Ann Landers? She would feel better about it—and so would I.

*Margo Howard*
*Cambridge, Mass.*

## Thieves of Baghdad

Lauren Sandler's "The Thieves of Baghdad" (November *Atlantic*) is, judging by the details in the story, based on one visit to Iraq, apparently in June of 2003. Sandler says 3,000 items were stolen from Iraq's National Museum, which was the official museum and U.S. Customs inventory count as of late June 2003, and does not give the figure of 14,000 that was in Colonel Matthew Bogdanos's report for the Department of Defense and in Andrew Lawler's *Science* article of August 2003. As for Jaber al-Tikriti, president of the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage, and Nawala al-Mutawalli, the director of museums, they can be faulted for many things, including their administrative capabilities and style, but the charges of criminal action are not believable.

At the time when Sandler was in the museum, a special investigative unit (the Bogdanos task force) made up of U.S. prosecutors, U.S. Customs agents, FBI agents, and police officers had been



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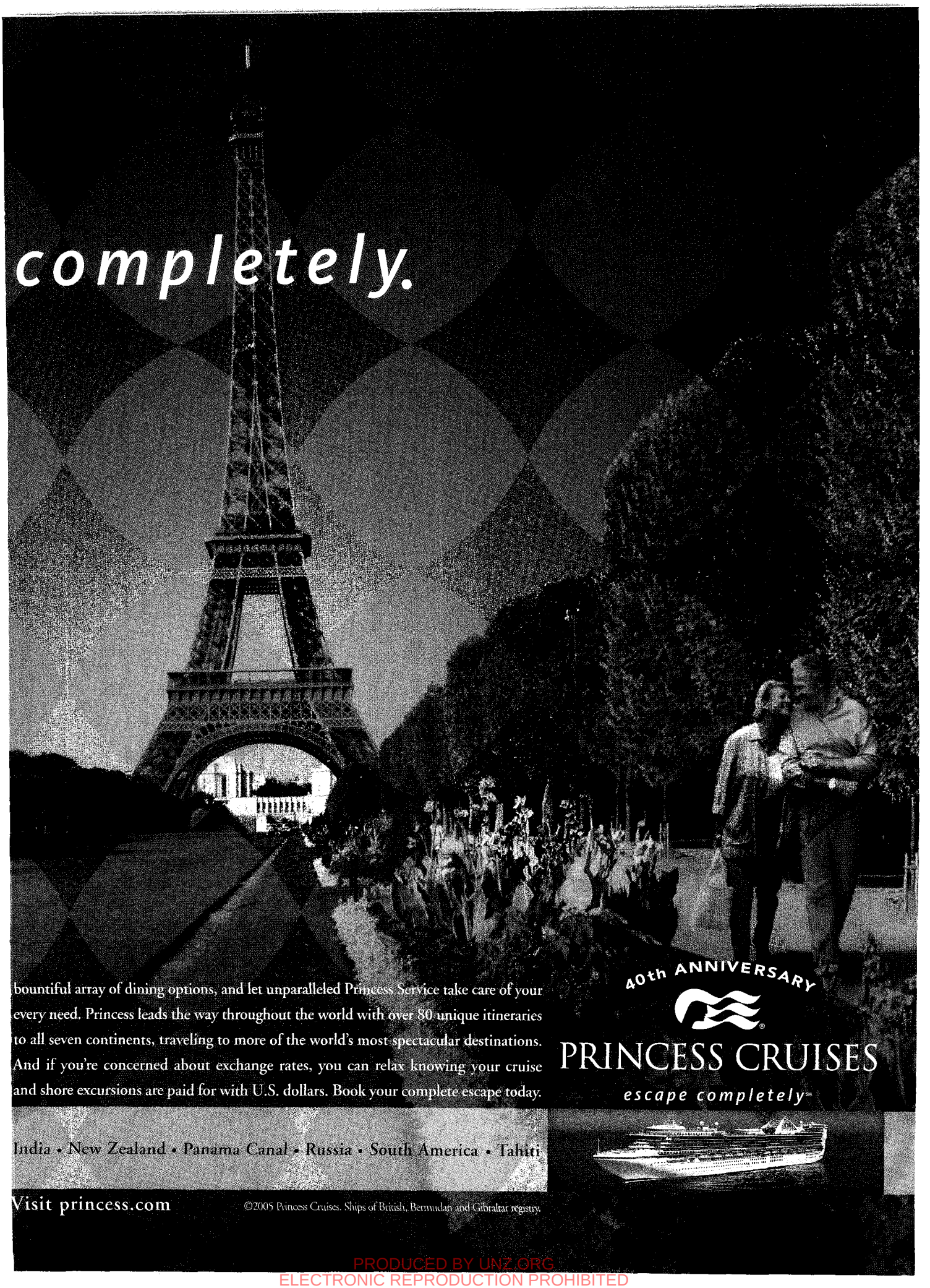


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assembled to determine the facts about the looting. Very little was left uninvestigated. The Bogdanos report mentions negligence (carelessness with keys and leaving one storeroom door unlocked) and concludes that inside knowledge was required for thieves to go to the precise right part of one storeroom to take cylinder seals and other objects. But no finding in that report charges that top-level museum and Antiquities Board officials had anything to do with the thefts. The inside information could have come from anyone who had worked at the museum in the preceding fifteen years, even a cleaning person. Just before the 2003 war the museum staff did, in fact, hide the great majority of objects that had been on display in the museum's public galleries. Muyaad al-Damirjy was assigned by the minister of culture to head that effort because he had done the same thing in 1991, and he and four other people were the only ones who knew where the secret store was. Weeks after Bogdanos arrived, enough mutual trust had developed to allow the museum director to disclose the location of the secret store, which Bogdanos then inspected. Of course Muyaad was uncommunicative when talking to reporters before this disclosure. Officials of an occupied country are understandably going to be suspicious of occupiers.

Sandler suggests that the museum was conspiratorially kept closed throughout the 1990s, so that pieces could be taken out by Saddam's bodyguard and brother-in-law Arshad Yassin with the collusion of Nawala and Jaber. You get the idea in the article that the museum displays were all there, but that no one was allowed to see them except through bribery.

The chief thrust of Sandler's article is that Arshad Yassin was able to get Nawala and Jaber to help him steal objects from the museum in the 1990s. He was undoubtedly involved in smuggling antiquities out of the country, and for this he was removed from his positions by Saddam and banished from the inner circle. Whether he continued to deal in antiquities I do not know, but to do so would have been dangerous.

The looting of the Iraq Museum started on April 10, 2003, and Arshad Yassin may have played a role in the work of the professional group that operated mainly in one set of storerooms. But to say that Nawala and Jaber had a hand in it is, in my opinion, absurd. They are professionals and take their obligations seriously. Whether they were good administrators or made the right decisions in the face of an invasion can be debated. The fact that the great majority of the objects on display were saved is to their credit. That the entire collection of almost 40,000 manuscripts under the museum's responsibility was safely stored in an air-raid bunker, along with the most important books from the museum's working library, must also be seen as wise.

The most interesting part of the article is at the end, where Sandler traces the movements of the man who took the Warka Vase out of the museum. Her version is quite different from the story he has told to journalists who speak Arabic. According to them, he approached the museum people very soon after the museum was secured from looters, saying that he had important pieces to return. All parties agreed that he would not bring the pieces back until the museum was guarded. About a month after the Marines arrived, he returned them.

*McGuire Gibson*
*Professor of Mesopotamian Archaeology*
*University of Chicago*
*Chicago, Ill.*

As the head of the investigation into the looting of the Iraq Museum, I read with interest Lauren Sandler's provocative article "The Thieves of Baghdad." As to the central question of how many missing antiquities were actually stolen before the war, I cannot quibble with Sandler's facts, but I can offer a broader perspective leading to a different reading of those facts.

First, there were clearly differing levels of cooperation among members of the museum staff. Some, but most especially Jaber al-Tikriti (the chairman of the State Board of Antiquities), Nawala al-Mutawalli (the director of the museum), and Donny George (the director for research), were particularly



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cooperative and forthright. Other staff members were decidedly uncooperative, and their statements frequently proved false. Most of the staff fell somewhere in between.

Second, significant discord within the staff manifested itself in many ways. For example, staff members were inconsistent in attesting to when an item had last been seen. Some of these inconsistencies were easily explained, and some were not. Without access to more witnesses, more museum documentation, and the government officials whose names appeared on various orders to remove certain antiquities, we were forced to leave many discrepancies unresolved. Staff members also leveled accusations against other staff members. Some were justified; others were not. Some were sincerely believed; some were a function of past grievances, political differences, or simply a desire for the accused's job.

Third, we found evidence that the staff had removed many items from the museum at the direction of the Hussein government, but very little evidence of why the items had been removed. In a brutal dictatorship the government does not ordinarily explain its actions, and its populace does not ordinarily ask for explanation, or disobey such directions.

Finally, although some members of the museum staff had apparently removed items for private gain, and although the thieves must have had the directors' master keys to access several areas from which antiquities were stolen, we never uncovered evidence implicating any of the three most senior museum officials in the theft of any of the antiquities.

*Matthew Bogdanos*
*Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps*
*Baghdad, Iraq*

***Lauren Sandler replies:***

*I reported this article for several months in both the United States and Iraq, where I spent nearly two months, in August and September of 2003. Although I was accompanied by an interpreter, many people I interviewed were fluent in English.*

*Many different methods have been used to catalogue the museum's contents, resulting in different figures for the objects looted after the fall of Baghdad. (Is a necklace one object, or is each bead an object? Is each cylinder seal an object, or does a collection share one number?) The figure I used (3,000) and the figure in the Bogdanos report (14,000) point to the same conclusion: the initial reports that 170,000 artifacts were stolen in April of 2003 were highly overstated.*

*What I wrote regarding Dr. Jaber al-Tikriti and Dr. Nawala al-Mutawalli was the result of a great deal of reporting, much of it involving conversations with people who spoke to me on the condition that they would not be named. I would not have included these two officials in the story had the allegations not been substantiated by a significant number of people I came to trust during my time in Iraq.*

*My article does contradict Matthew Bogdanos's report, which I reviewed and discussed with various people, including Colonel Bogdanos, before I traveled to Iraq. During our conversation he told me that he was quite proud of the close relationships he had developed with people in power in the Department of Antiquities, most notably Dr. Jaber. I was not surprised, therefore, when many people who held less power at the department and in the museum told me they did not feel safe telling Bogdanos all they knew, or believed they knew, about these people.*

*The admission of foreign scholars to the museum for research has nothing to do with the fact that Iraqis had to pay bribes to see objects relating to their own history. I did not visit the museum until 2003, so I cannot give an eyewitness account of what the galleries looked like before then. But many people I interviewed told me what the museum looked like during their years of work there.*

*I am aware that my account of the theft of the Warka Vase differs in some respects from the one given by Arab journalists. This is not a matter of translation; it is a matter of compression. Some details deemed less important were cut for length and continuity. Their absence does not change the truth of what I wrote: that three men (who had never been let into the museum before they entered as looters), when unable to fence what they had looted, returned invaluable objects, such as the Warka Vase, to the museum with the utmost care.*



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I am disappointed with Cristina Nehring's review of *Will in the World*, Stephen Greenblatt's biography of Shakespeare ("Shakespeare in Love, or in Context," December *Atlantic*). Nehring uses her review to voice two major complaints: first, that because Shakespeare failed to live as dramatic or theatrical a life as some of his fellow dramatists, such as Christopher Marlowe, the facts about his life are both sparse and dull; second, that Greenblatt is a practitioner of the "new historicism" in literary criticism, a movement whose philosophy Nehring has loathed for a long time.

With regard to the first complaint, biographical information is sparse even for Shakespeare's more colorful contemporaries (except Ben Jonson), and as Greenblatt and other recent biographers have pointed out, Shakespeare's kinship to families with Roman Catholic loyalties probably caused him to be extremely careful about putting personal information in writing.

With regard to Nehring's animus against the new historicism, her diatribe against Greenblatt's theory and practice proved thoroughly alienating for me. Although I undertook graduate study of Elizabethan drama in the age of the "new criticism," augmented by literary theory steeped in "myth criticism," I frequently find studies that put literature in a cultural context to be useful.

Nehring claims, as well, that Greenblatt focuses on historical trivia while ignoring Shakespeare's inner life. But this complaint is not really fair, since Greenblatt stresses both the psychological insecurity Shakespeare probably felt because of his family's Catholic connections and his constant obsession with dispossession and loss, which probably began with his father's business reverses.

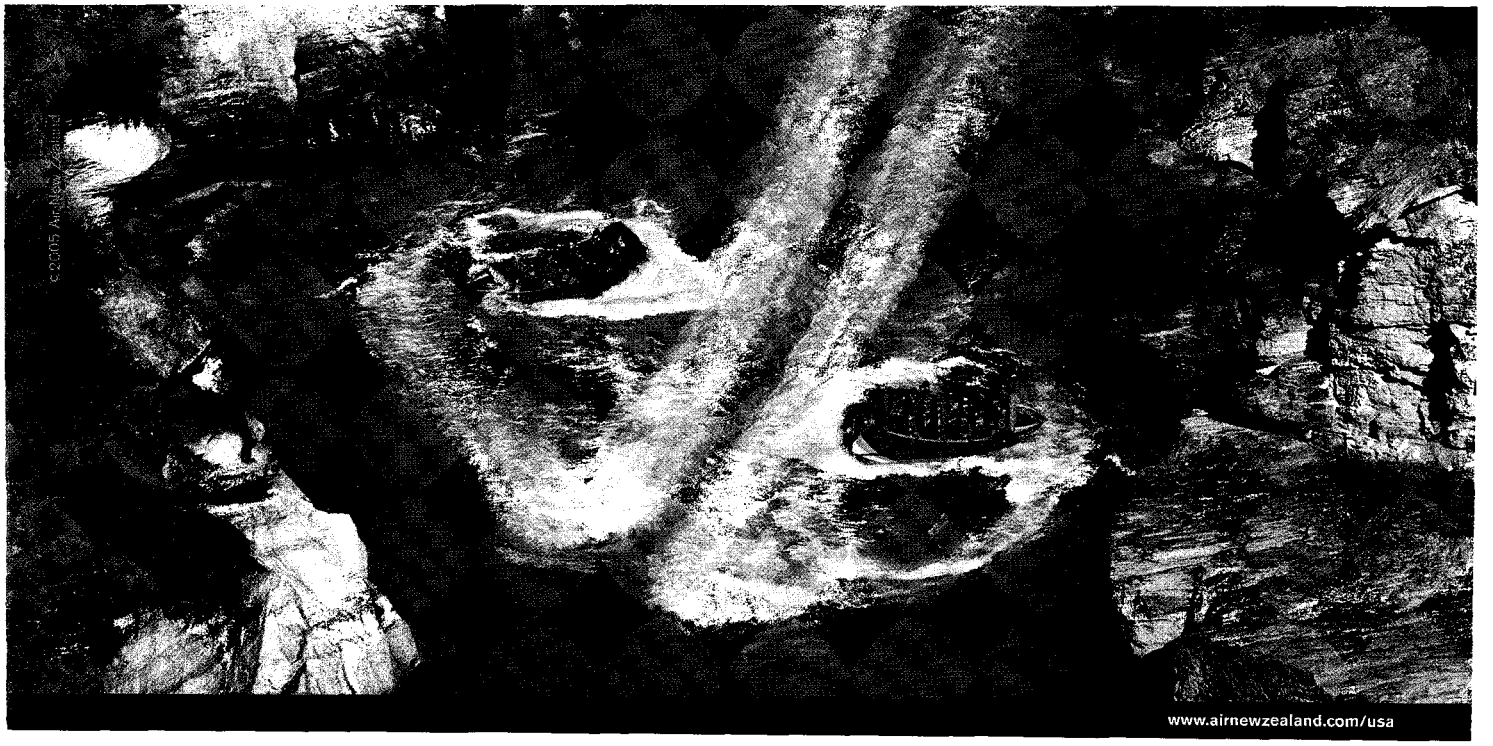
Nehring might have provided a more helpful review of *Will in the World* if she had compared the book with other recent biographies of the Bard, by Michael Wood, Anthony Holden, and Ian Wilson, to name a few. As I am familiar with these books, I can say that they are like Greenblatt's in relying heavily on a description of Shakespeare's historical context.

*Edgar L. Chapman*
*Professor Emeritus*
*Bradley University*
*Peoria, Ill.*

Although I found Cristina Nehring's review of *Will in the World* informative about both Shakespeare and the new historicism, I was troubled by her casual assumption that William Wordsworth was guilty of incest.

Although some psychological critics have speculated about Wordsworth's feelings toward his sister Dorothy, I am unaware of any evidence in scholarly sources that offers factual support for this claim. If I have missed the evidence, I hope that Nehring will fill in this gap for me.

*Walter S. Minot*
*Professor Emeritus*
*Gannon University*
*Mobile, Ala.*

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***Cristina Nehring replies:***

*Edgar Chapman's defense of Shakespeare and Greenblatt rests on a remarkably thorough misreading of my article.*

*Chapman believes that I think Shakespeare led a boring life and therefore am bored by a biography of him. My point is exactly the opposite. I find it riveting that Shakespeare's life was so quiet and conventional while his drama is so passionate and anarchic. I find it riveting that the man who primly disinherited his daughter for sexual indiscretions should portray—so sympathetically—bold young women defying their fathers for love. It is this paradox that fuels a fair part of my fascination with Renaissance biography: the tamest lives often produce the most turbulent art, and the most adventuresome of men are frequently the least adventuresome of writers.*

*Chapman further faults me for my criticisms of the new historicism, a movement he says I have "loathed for a long time." (How does he know?) Even an old bear like himself, trained on earlier modes of literary analysis, can see that "studies that put literature in a cultural context can be useful." I agree; only when that context displaces the literature do we have a problem. Only when a work of individual inspiration and universal resonance is rendered as the sum total of the rites, regulations, and customs of one particular social milieu do we lose our way. When* Hamlet *comes across as a sort of community project—the immaculate conception of "social energy"—I begin to object. That said, Greenblatt is undoubtedly the most eloquent exponent of this sort of view; far from loathing him, I admitted to being all but seduced by his voice—if not its message.*

*"Somewhere in the world ... a book on Shakespeare is published every day," writes Anthony Holden in one of the biographies that Chapman would have had me compare and contrast with Greenblatt's. Very few will ever win the notice of general or even scholarly readers; very few offer a new perspective. Greenblatt's is one of those, which is why I elected to give* Will in the World *the bulk of my attention.*

*If Walter Minot is looking for the stained blue dress, he won't find it: hard evidence of incest in the eighteenth century is difficult to come by. What we have instead, in the case of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, is an abundance of well-founded speculation. It is the rare biographer who does not expound on Wordsworth's peculiarly intense attachment to his sister. This is the woman, after all, who slept wearing his wife's wedding ring the night before his marriage, and succumbed to hysteria—"neither hearing nor seeing anything"—during the church ceremony. This is the woman on whose shoulder Wordsworth regularly napped and who probably inspired "Strange Fits of Passion" and other love lyrics.*

*Whether one calls the relationship "unquestionably, profoundly sexual," like the poet's best-known modern biographer, Stephen Gill (*William Wordsworth: A Life*); "strange" and "unhealthy," like Hunter Davies (*William Wordsworth: A Biography*); or clearly "incestuous," like F. W. Bateson (*Wordsworth: A Reinterpretation*), is a matter of opinion. I do not mean to weigh in on this debate.*

I take exception to the opening sentence of Mona Simpson's review of *Gilead*, by Marilynne Robinson ("The Minister's Tale," December *Atlantic*). *Housekeeping* is a fantastic book, but "one of the ten best novels of the past century"? Be serious. In a century of works by Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, Willa Cather, William Faulkner, Marcel Proust, Albert Camus, Günther Grass, Gabriel García Márquez, Ralph Ellison, and E. M. Forster—to name just a dozen authors who have written better books?

*Rob Franciosi*
*Allendale, Mich.*

***Mona Simpson replies:***

*I meant what I said. Although I certainly wouldn't dispute the place of* The Tin Drum, One Hundred Years of Solitude, Absalom, Absalom!, Remembrance of Things Past, To the Lighthouse, *and* Ulysses *(though I prefer* Dubliners*) on a list of the ten best novels of the past century, I would not include fiction by Camus (though it's charming that someone still reads it). I like and re-read Cather, Lawrence, and Conrad, but no single work of theirs strikes me as exceptional on the level of* The Great Gatsby *(a work Rob Franciosi excludes from his list). Even though Franciosi doesn't mention Henry James, whose work I love, some could argue that he is a twentieth-century novelist, because many of his novels were published in their final form, collected as the New York Edition, in the early twentieth century. But I go by the original publication date, so I place his most enduring works in the nineteenth century. Of course, stunning books such as the memoirs of W. G. Sebald, Levi's* Survival in Auschwitz, *and almost all the collections of Alice Munro are precluded from silly lists like this simply because they are not novels.*

In your December issue Benjamin Schwarz (Editor's Choice) calls Willa Cather "probably the finest lesbian American novelist." This seems a bit like calling Abraham Lincoln "probably the greatest bearded American president." The qualification seems pointless—and unnecessary.

*Robert Bagley*
*Princeton, N.J.*

***Benjamin Schwarz replies:***

*Is Robert Bagley willfully missing my point? In my review I criticize the* Encyclopedia of the Great Plains *because it has "politically correct" categories like "gender" along with categories for literature, music, etc. I said that this makes for a lot of confusion—for example, some black saxophonists are listed in the "African Americans" section, while others are found in the music section. I wrote that given the PC nature of the organizing scheme, I expected to find Cather, who was probably the finest American novelist who was a lesbian, under "gender" (where another female Nebraskan novelist is listed), but was happy to find her instead in the literary section.*

*My entire point was that historical figures shouldn't be categorized by their race or gender, which seems also to be Bagley's point. But on the other hand, qualification in this case doesn't seem pointless. Cather isn't the greatest American novelist; she is the greatest novelist who was a lesbian—not an unimportant distinction.*



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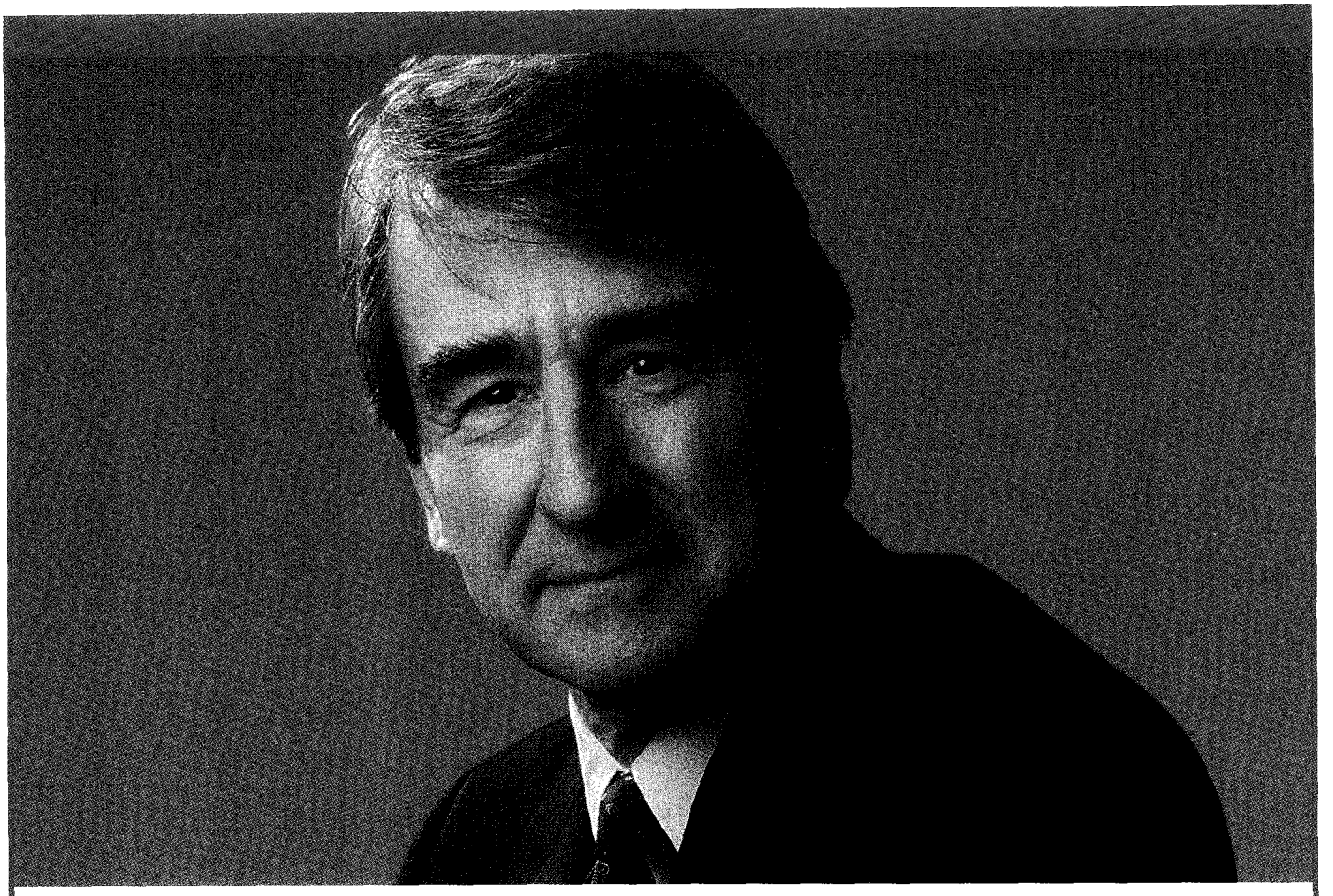

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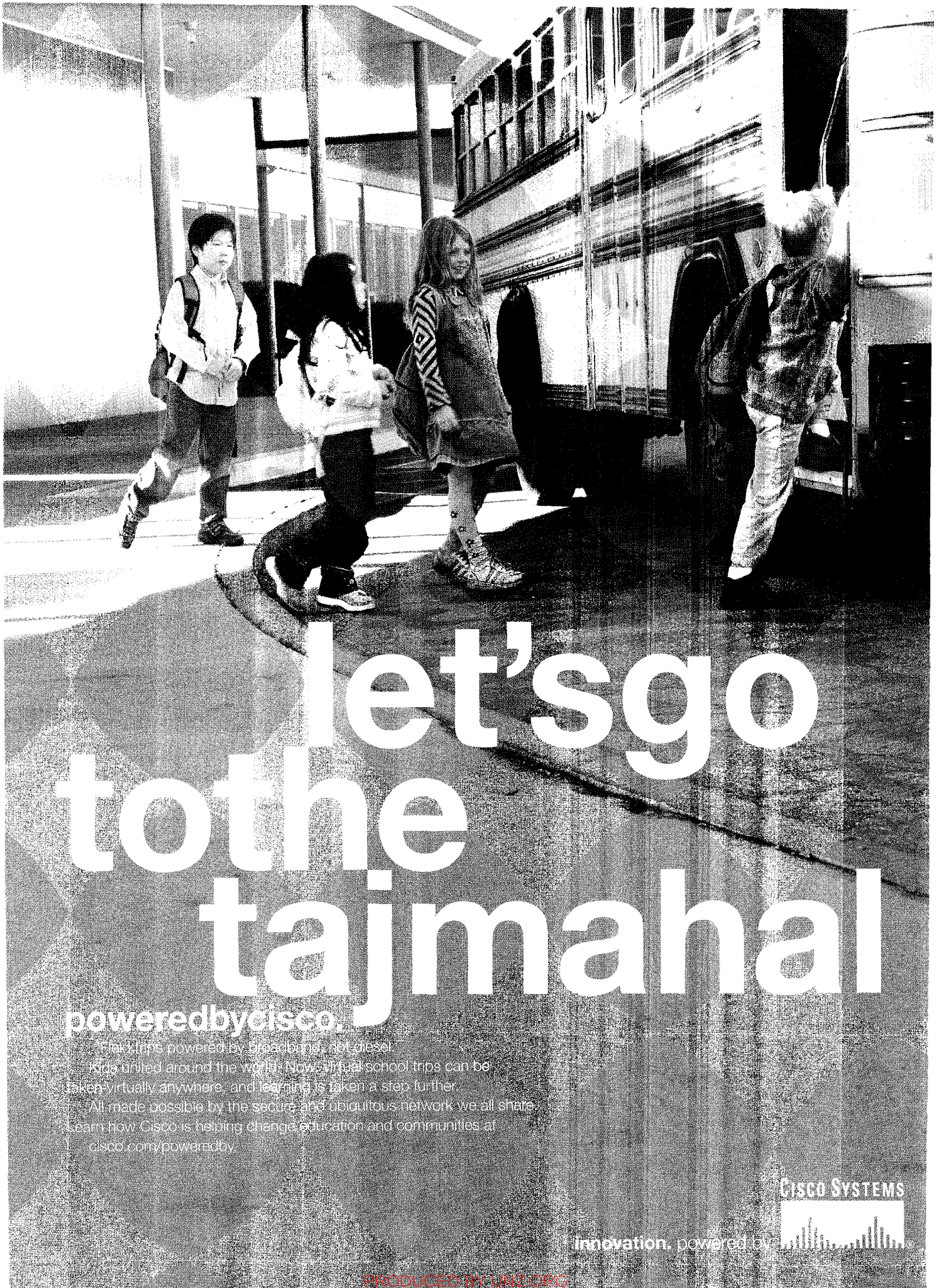

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COMMENT

# Getting Out Right

*Warnings from many experts went unheeded before we entered Iraq. Let's listen as we prepare to "shape the exit"*

BY JAMES FALLOWS

The United States cannot start over in Iraq. But it has one last chance to adjust course and partly correct its previous mistakes. With the Iraqi elections in January, the United States entered what will be the last stage of its engagement there: the transition to withdrawal. No one knows how long this stage will last—perhaps one year, perhaps a few. But its end point is obvious. Either because things are going well enough that U.S. troops can leave or because they are going badly enough that the Americans have to go, sooner or later the heavy U.S. presence will be removed. Political forces in Iraq will demand it; so will politics in the United States. America's chance now is to "shape the exit," as some military planners put it—to determine how it will use its remaining influence in Iraq.

The people who have been most prescient in warning about mistakes over the past three years have suggestions about the final stage. The list of mistakes they tried to avert is familiar, but it bears repeating because of the fresh opportunity to learn from it. The two common themes are a lack of foresight and a lack of insight—that is, a failure to ask "What happens next?" and a failure to wonder "How will this look through Iraqi eyes?" Aside from ensuring that enough soldiers were on hand to seal borders and impose order once Baghdad fell, the United States could have managed the occupation differently. It could have prepared itself better for the inevitable Iraqi resentment of a foreign force. It could have stockpiled spare parts for Iraq's battered electrical system, in order to restore lost power quickly and pre-empt complaints that daily life in Baghdad was less convenient than it had been under Saddam Hussein. It could have viewed the prospect of looting as a dire threat to Iraq's recovery, and told its commanders that they must fill the power vacuum Saddam's overthrow would create. (The American indifference to postwar looting is still, two years later, the biggest unexplained failure of Iraq policy.) It could have found ways to get income to the families of the Iraqi soldiers it made jobless.

To a striking degree, the people who warned in real time about the consequences of these and similar decisions were not academics or antiwar bloggers but military officers, both active and retired. What is the gist of their advice now? That America should act on an idea



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that was conventional wisdom after the Vietnam War and still receives pro forma nods of approval whenever it is raised. The idea is that counterinsurgency wars, such as the war to make Iraq stable enough to permit America's departure, are never determined by machines and materiel alone; they have very powerful symbolic and psychological components. Until the United States understands that the "battle for hearts and minds" is more than a slogan, it will lose. To win, it needs to deal with Iraq on far more intimate terms than are possible from fighter bombers dropping munitions or from within armored Humvees. It needs to learn the language, penetrate the culture, recruit spies and sympathizers—to do the slow and messy work of building support for its side.

**Until the United States understands that the "battle for hearts and minds" is more than a slogan, it will lose.**

For instance, H. John Poole, a Marine combat veteran of Vietnam, wrote in *Tactics of the Crescent Moon* that bombarding cities, as the United States did in its takeover of Fallujah, almost always backfires, because embittered civilians provide more cover to guerrillas and terrorists. The Marine colonel Thomas Hammes argued in his counterinsurgency book *The Sling and the Stone* that to deal with insurgents the military must radically flatten its own command structure, giving much more authority to small, independent teams and even to individual soldiers. Douglas Macgregor, a recently retired Army colonel, wrote last winter,

> Most of the generals and politicians did not think through the consequences of compelling American soldiers with no knowledge of Arabic or Arab culture to implement intrusive measures inside an Islamic society. We arrested people in front of their families, dragging them away in handcuffs with bags over their heads, and then provided no information to the families of those we incarcerated. In the end, our soldiers killed, maimed and incarcerated thousands of Arabs, 90 percent of whom were not the enemy. But they are now.

Three retired officers—G. I. Wilson of the Marines, Chet Richards of the Air Force, and Greg Wilcox of the Army—have published an analysis of how the United States could use a broad combination of "hard" and "soft" measures to weaken the insurgents, reduce their propaganda advantage, and turn the population against them. The report, which is available in full at d-n-i.net, emphasizes that any one approach in isolation is likely to fail. It draws on a concept introduced in 1999 by General Charles Krulak, then the commandant of the Marine Corps, about the need to pursue several different kinds of warfare all-out and all at once. To defeat insurgents, Krulak said, the United States must simultaneously launch ambitious humanitarian and reconstruction efforts; use its advanced weaponry selectively when enemy forces decide to stand and fight; and aggressively deploy small, independent teams of specialized anti-insurgent operators who would constitute a kind of American guerrilla force. The last step would represent the greatest departure from standard hierarchical American practice. Indeed, Krulak called his concept "The Strategic Corporal," with the idea that the war would turn on the skill and cunning of privates and corporals on both sides.

The Wilson-Richards-Wilcox report is one of many to emphasize the military importance of language and cultural training. Chet Richards, himself a former attaché in the Middle East, recently told the newsletter *Inside the Pentagon*, "You don't have to have a Ph.D. in Middle Eastern culture to know that kicking down doors at two A.M., screaming at and manhandling family members, and dragging off the men isn't going to win a lot of friends." H. R. McMaster, an Army colonel, is well known for his book *Dereliction of Duty*, which argued that more senior officers should have resigned in protest during the Vietnam era; he is now instituting language and cultural training for troops headed for Iraq. H. Thomas Hayden, a retired Marine officer who ran counterinsurgency teams in Vietnam and was a combat commander in the Gulf War, told me recently, "You should never put Americans inside a counterinsurgency effort without a basic understanding of the language. I wasn't fluent in Arabic, but a mere greeting in their language opened things up."

In an article written for *Marine Corps Gazette* just before the Iraqi elections, Hayden laid out his combination of hard and soft tactics. For instance, the United States should take advantage of the "census grievance." In Arab societies the local tribal chief or governor traditionally allowed one day a month "for the people (anybody) to petition their leaders for a redress of grievances." This was a tremendous source of local intelligence, Hayden said, which Americans could use to reduce their blindness about local conditions.

Like virtually every other military authority now writing, Hayden has emphasized that in this transition phase the United States must remove the American face from the counterinsurgent effort, mainly through intense efforts to train and advise Iraqi forces. At the same time, it should do everything it can to create jobs for Iraqis—"If one cliché fits Iraq," he says, "it would be 'It's the economy, stupid'"—and ensure that its troops and advisers rapidly become fluent in the language and with the mores of the country where they are operating.

After the January 30 elections I asked Hayden if the United States still had a chance to reconfigure its operations along these lines. Training more Arabic linguists would take time, I pointed out. So would developing intelligence and propaganda networks within Iraq. Were those realistic ambitions for, say, the next year?

"Can these changes be made in a year?" he replied, incredulous. "They've got to be made tomorrow."

*James Fallows is a national correspondent for* The Atlantic.



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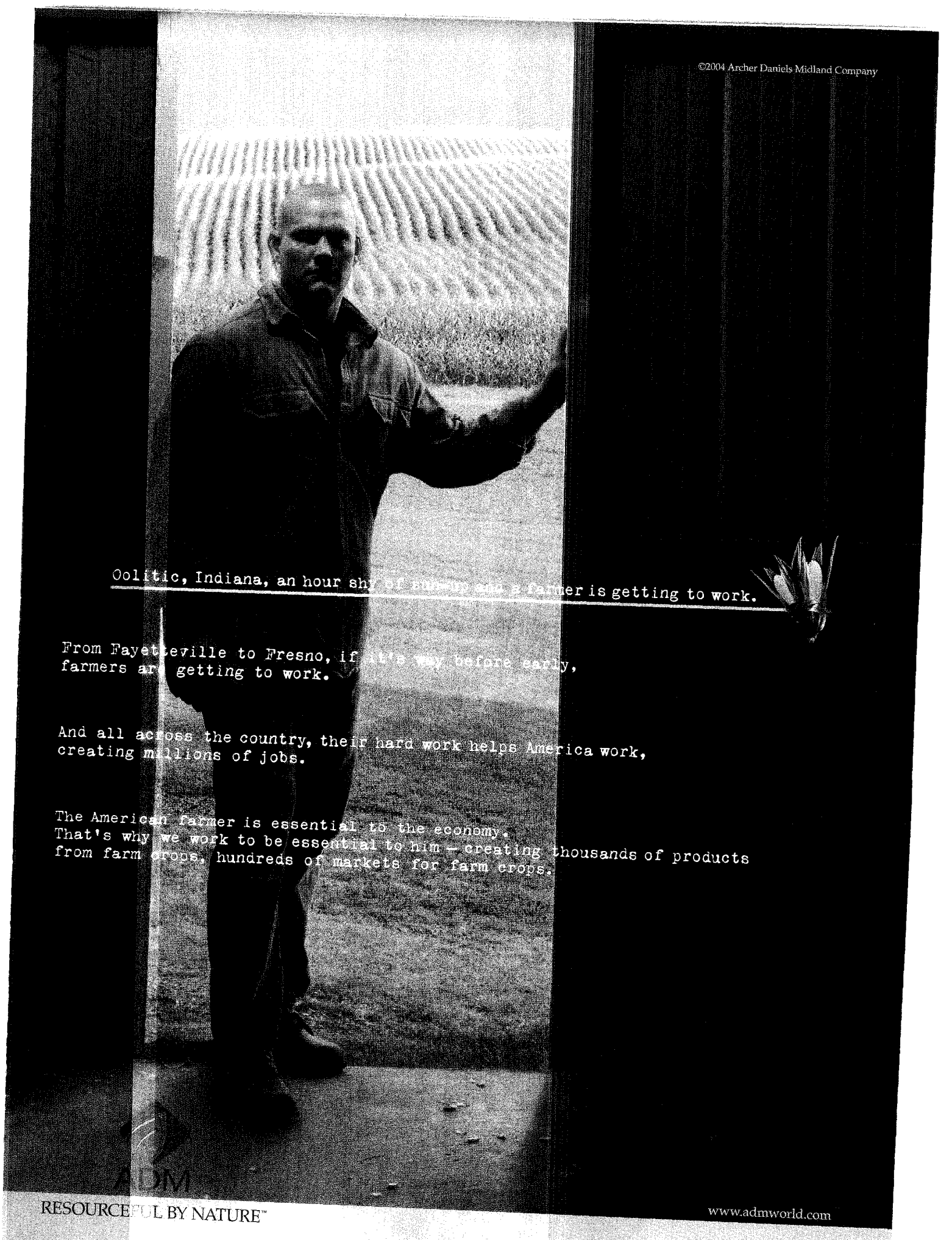


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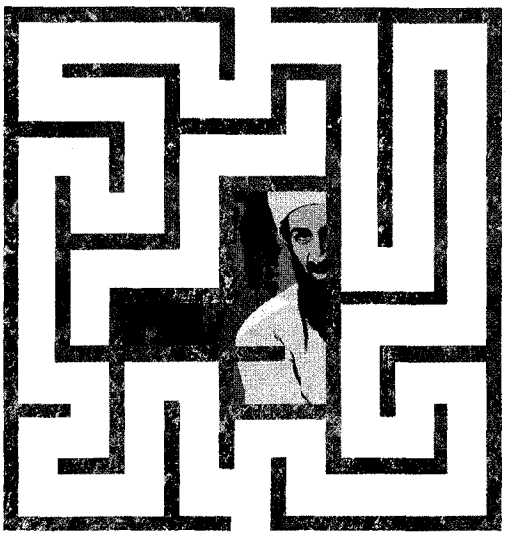
INTELLIGENCE

# Inside Out

*Why it's so hard to infiltrate al-Qaeda*

BY MICHAEL SCHEUER

The reason we didn't prevent 9/11 is simple: neither the CIA nor its intelligence allies, Western or Muslim, had a spy or an informant inside al-Qaeda's command structure. And the stark reality is that our human intelligence against al-Qaeda and other Sunni militants will probably never be as good as what we had against the Soviet system during the Cold War.



Why is this the case? In the Soviet Union the people most difficult for Western intelligence agents to recruit were found at the entry level of the Communist system—young men and women who were moving from youth groups and school systems into the military, the KGB, Party organizations, or the diplomatic corps. At this stage these people were steeped in Marxism-Leninism, believed that socialism worked, had faith in the USSR, and were hostile toward the United States. The ideologically committed are always the toughest to recruit for intelligence services.

But on those occasions when the West could develop an informant at this level, the Soviet system unwittingly assisted in that development. With each promotion in the Communist ranks, the potential informant would see more clearly that socialism delivered nepotism, tyranny, and corruption, rather than fairness and equity. Non-Russians (those hailing from the Soviet republics and satellite states) would quickly realize that ethnic discrimination dominated the world in which they worked. In short, the further up the Soviet hierarchy our would-be informant progressed, the more likely the system was to disillusion him, making him more vulnerable to the Western intelligence services.

Here's the challenge that al-Qaeda and other Sunni militant groups pose: In such organizations the old Soviet scenario is exactly reversed—the militants who are least ideologically committed (and therefore most easily recruited by our spy agencies) are found at the edges of the groups, among the ranks of those who perform gunrunning, human smuggling, and narcotics trafficking. Once we've recruited these people, their value to us increases as they move toward the center of al-Qaeda. The problem is that the higher a would-be spy rises in al-Qaeda's ranks, the greater the ideological and theological commitment of his associates; Sunni leaders are often (though certainly not always) the devout and courageous men their media organizations claim them to be. Career advancement in al-Qaeda tends to wash away much of the mercenary hypocrisy found at the entry level—and therefore, in effect, to unrecruit those cultivated by our intelligence agencies. The odds of our ever having an informant among the senior al-Qaeda decision-makers are remote.

*Michael Scheuer headed the Osama bin Laden group at the CIA, where he worked in HUMINT-collection operations for more than twenty years. He is the author (as "Anonymous") of* Through My Enemies' Eyes *and* Imperial Hubris.

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POLITICS

# The Air America Plan

*Liberal talk radio is off the ground. Will the electorate turn blue, or just red in the face?*

BY JOSHUA GREEN

To be a Democrat on Inauguration Day was to feel like an Athenian in the dwindling days of the Peloponnesian War: here was yet another defeat in a streak that had stretched on for years, grinding a once mighty empire practically to dust. For some Democrats it was simply too much. An admission that their party is essentially bereft of ideas seemed to gain purchase in the wake of George Bush's swearing in.

But for other Democrats the day signified a minor skirmish won. The liberal radio network Air America made its debut in Washington, D.C., and also in Detroit and Cincinnati, increasing its nationwide reach to forty-five markets—"a remarkable feat," *The Wall Street Journal* declared, for an enterprise that last year was tossed off the air in two of its three top markets within weeks of its first broadcast, and narrowly avoided going under.

Most Democrats consider the emergence of liberal talk radio a vital precursor to any return to power. They are unified in the belief that they must build a political "infrastructure" (the reigning buzzword) to compete with the Republicans', and many activists say that liberal talk radio, though still in its infancy, is already the most mature component. The decision by the media conglomerate Clear Channel Communications to carry Air America programming on twenty-two stations was particularly cheering; Clear Channel syndicates such conservative heavyweights as Rush Limbaugh and Dr. Laura Schlessinger—models for those who see in Air America's recent success an incipient liberal juggernaut. The political climate offers further encouragement. "Suddenly," says Michael Harrison, the publisher of *Talkers*, an industry magazine, "liberals and others not of the conservative mind set are finding themselves in the same position conservatives did in the early nineties—out of power." This has sparked a near missionary faith among some liberals in the transformative power of talk radio. For those seeking a silver lining in the Republican domination of Washington—well, there aren't many other options, are there?

The hopes invested in liberal talk radio stem from a pair of widely held beliefs that transcend ideology. First is that the Republicans' rise to power in the early 1990s was sharply reinforced by the emergence of such talk-radio hosts as Limbaugh and G. Gordon Liddy, who helped persuade a large segment of the public, and some astute politicians, to embrace the conservative cause. Their importance was such that when the GOP took power in the House in 1994, one Republican, echoing his party's sentiment, declared, "Rush Limbaugh is really as responsible for what has happened as any individual in America."

Liberals agreed. This led to the second belief: that the Democrats could replicate the talk-radio phenomenon to mount a resurgence. At least since 1994 liberals have labored to do so, while conservatives have gleefully mocked their failure. Both groups are convinced that cultivating partisan talk radio is an unambiguously good thing for their respective movements.

But maybe it isn't, as a closer look at the political effects of talk radio suggests. Newt Gingrich and his Republican Revolution are a good example. There's little doubt that talk radio contributed to their triumph; what's often overlooked is its role in their fall.

To illustrate the hazards liberal talk radio poses, it's helpful to think of conservative talk radio as having two distinct phases: the wilderness years of the early 1990s—and after. Because Rush Limbaugh was the most influential host (nearly 40 percent of talk-radio listeners tuned in to him), he makes a good case study. In the early 1990s Limbaugh came to prominence as an outsider who relied heavily on political humor. His barbs had a conservative slant, of course, skewering perceived liberal excesses regarding feminism, the environment, abortion, government spending, and homelessness. (He also targeted Republicans he deemed insufficiently faithful, most notably President George H.W. Bush.) As James Fallows wrote in these pages in 1994, Limbaugh's material was culturally oriented: "His opinions were political in the broadest sense but were not confined to straight party politics."

As Limbaugh's influence grew, so did his inclination to wield it. A 1993 *National Review* cover story hailed him as "The Leader of the Opposition." When the GOP took power, Limbaugh was made an honorary House member. Shortly afterward Gingrich invited him and other conservative talk-show hosts to become fixtures in the Capitol. Co-opted by power, Limbaugh morphed from GOP mascot into a policy adviser/intellectual enforcer, his humor and cultural acumen succumbing to reflexive amplification of the party agenda.

Given the absolutism of his views, it isn't surprising that Limbaugh gravitated toward highly controversial policies—many of which, in hindsight, were politically foolish. One of his first cam-



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THE LIST

## THE ART OF THE STEAL

Have art thieves gotten bolder? Last summer's broad-daylight heist of Edvard Munch's *The Scream* from the Munch Museum, in Oslo, Norway, was the latest in a series of brazen thefts of high-profile artworks. And according to Interpol, trade in stolen cultural property now makes up one of the world's most lucrative black markets, after dealing in illicit arms and drugs. Operating in the spirit of its "Most Wanted" posters, the FBI—which has just assembled a new task force on art theft—posts pictures of stolen items on its Web site. Here are some of the more notable robberies of the past two decades, ranked according to the U.S. dollar value of the stolen goods. —*MICHAEL SLENSKE*

**1. Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, Massachusetts (1990).** Disguised as Boston cops responding to a (fake) disturbance call, two burglars handcuffed security guards to handrails to pull off the biggest art heist in U.S. history. With an estimated value of $300 million, the thieves' take included works by Rembrandt, Manet, and Vermeer.

**2. Drumlanrig Castle, Thornhill, Scotland (2003).** Two thieves posing as tourists overpowered their student guide at the Duke of Buccleuch's castle and lifted Leonardo da Vinci's *Madonna With the Yardwinder*, worth more than $150 million. The bandits opened a window, slid down the castle wall, told two New Zealand tourists outside that they were policemen practicing a drill, and made off in a beat-up VW.

**3. Munch Museum, Oslo, Norway (2004).** Two masked, armed villains pulled *The Scream* and *Madonna* off the museum walls as visitors watched; then they fled in a waiting car. The paintings together are valued at $74 million. Their frames were found not far from the museum.

**4. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria (2003).** In the space of fifty-four seconds Benvenuto Cellini's solid-gold *Saliera*—known as "the *Mona Lisa* of sculptures," and valued at roughly $65 million—was stolen by a bold thief. Though an alarm sounded, a museum guard turned it off, thinking it was false.

**5. Esther Koplowitz residence, Madrid, Spain (2001).** Three robbers blindfolded and gagged an apartment security guard before kicking in the door of a penthouse belonging to Spain's richest woman. The thieves absconded with more than $50 million worth of paintings and sculptures, including Goya's *The Swing* and Brueghel's *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*. All were eventually recovered.

**6. Breitwieser's European spree (1995–2001).** Stephane Breitwieser, a waiter, was arrested in Switzerland after pinching hundreds of pieces across Europe (with a total value of $14 million to $20 million) over the course of seven years. In an attempt to cover her son's tracks, Breitwieser's mother took a hammer and scissors to stolen paintings, and tossed vases and statues into a local canal; more than 100 items were later removed from the mud and restored.

**7. New Mexico Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, New Mexico (2003).** A year after the theft of Georgia O'Keeffe's *Special No. 21* (valued at up to $1 million), investigators still don't know what happened. William Crumpton—a former security guard at Santa Fe's Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, who is known to have attempted to steal her *Red Canna* from that museum during one of his graveyard shifts—admitted to stealing *Special No. 21*. But Crumpton later said—and a lie-detector test backed him up—that he had confessed only because he had been up for thirty hours and wanted to get some sleep.

**8. Elvis-A-Rama Museum, Las Vegas, Nevada (2004).** After thieves drove a stolen tow truck through the museum's back door, it took them only five minutes (using lead pipes) to smash the Plexiglas display cases housing $325,000 worth of Elvis's personal effects. Among them: a gold-plated handgun, a signature white scarf from his Hilton performance days, and a diamond "EP" pendant. Although the bandits made off with 80 percent of the Elvis jewelry on display, they no doubt drove straight to Heartbreak Hotel after realizing they had left behind the King's million-dollar blue suede shoes.

paigns in 1995 was to attack government-funded school lunch programs. At his prompting thousands of obedient listeners harassed elected officials, school administrators, and journalists, and put the issue on front pages nationwide. Limbaugh further advocated abolishing the Department of Education and the Environmental Protection Agency. He wanted to eliminate Social Security. He wanted to abolish the National Endowment for the Arts, and to cut social services for legal and illegal immigrants and unwed teenage mothers.

These campaigns made him appear, perhaps accurately, to delight in meanspiritedness. In a masterstroke of political tone-deafness Limbaugh embraced defunding the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, home of the popular children's program *Sesame Street*. The attempt to kill off Bert and Ernie sparked a backlash that today stands as a model for one of the easiest kinds of political blackmail. When a dispute erupted last year between Viacom and the satellite-TV provider Dish Network, Dish dropped Viacom channels including Nickelodeon. Viacom ran full-page newspaper ads featuring a stricken-looking SpongeBob SquarePants and a note explaining to the parents of aggrieved youngsters that Dish Network was holding him hostage. Guess who won?

It isn't that Limbaugh wasn't effective. He was measurably so. In researching the book *Rushed to Judgment: Talk Radio, Persuasion, and American Political Behavior*, the political scientist David C. Barker posited a "Limbaugh effect," tested it on human subjects, and determined that it withstood academic scrutiny. Barker described the effect as "strong independent associations between Limbaugh listening and [holding] a variety of opinions regarding topics frequently treated on the Limbaugh show."

The trouble was that Limbaugh's opinions were becoming ever more strident, and after the 1994 elections he and his co-conspirators gradually lost touch with the American electorate. Notable moments in second-phase talk radio include the controversy over Liddy's urging listeners to kill agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms ("Head shots, head shots ...



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kill the sons of bitches"), a sentiment widely condemned following the 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City. Limbaugh was foremost among those who urged Gingrich and the House leadership to force a government shutdown later that year—a piece of adolescent acting out that probably saved Bill Clinton's stalled presidency by providing compelling new villains to blame for the country's woes. And no episode of talk-radio extremism looms quite so large as the crusade to impeach Clinton. This had a measurable effect too, thinning the ranks of Republican politicians.

In the end those who could least afford to overestimate Limbaugh's discernment and persuasiveness were precisely those who did so—the Republican leaders. By urging Gingrich and others into acts of political extremism, Limbaugh hastened their downfall. The hopeless Bob Dole once intoned, "When Rush Limbaugh talks, you know you're listening to the real world." Dole's crashing defeat in the 1996 presidential election demonstrated the accuracy of this statement.

It's still early, but Air America is following a path a lot like the one Limbaugh took. In the late 1980s, while trying to turn Limbaugh from a regional into a national presence, his handlers hit on a way of doing so quickly and cheaply, by offering his program free to struggling stations in exchange for a share of the advertising revenue. Soon *The Rush Limbaugh Show* was taking off. Clear Channel is attempting a similar maneuver with liberal talk radio, testing Air America programs on low-performing stations across the country, and so far it is having modest success. The network is on the verge of reaching 75 percent of the U.S. population—at which point it can expect to attract national advertisers and, if all goes well, a following that may begin to approach Limbaugh's.

Careful listeners, however, will detect a dissonance between the political significance attributed to liberal radio and the caliber of discourse it generally provides. Talk radio will never be a forum for measured debate, though Al Franken occasionally offers a wicked dose of humor, as Limbaugh once did. But taken as a whole, the network is already infected by the corrosive negativity, strutting egotism, and bizarre paranoia that marked much of what traversed the conservative airwaves in the late 1990s.

Angry liberals surely take pleasure in hearing a host call President Bush a "lazy sack of crap," or shrug at complaints about the network's absurd speculation that Bush knew about 9/11 in advance and permitted the attacks for his own political gain. Yet the notion that such nonsense is politically beneficial retains a subliminal credibility with true believers of every stripe.

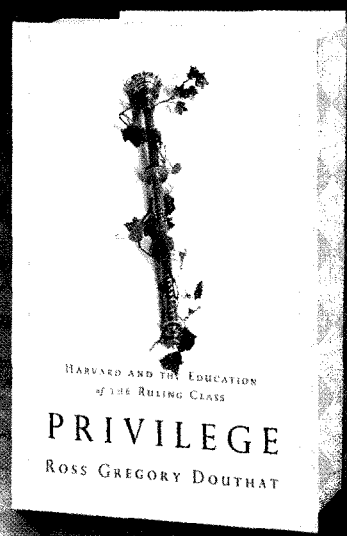
Much of what Air America carries is anger-laced polemic that plays to the furthest-left element of the electorate. The early Limbaugh was a populist at once funny and capable of maneuvering outside the party line; but few liberal hosts display any enthusiasm for attracting people beyond the segment that is already passionately attuned to their brand of smug, hostile liberalism. It's hard to imagine that a "Franken factor" will soon emerge to rival the "Limbaugh effect." Rather, Air America's broadcasts seem merely to reinforce a certain condescension—hampering rather than helping a Democratic Party desperate to expand its appeal in red states.

In this sense, at least, liberal talk radio has beat even Limbaugh's evolutionary pace. One of the first controversies it engendered, in fact, echoed Liddy's talk about killing federal agents. The host Randi Rhodes, invoking the denouement of *The Godfather, Part II*, proposed to listeners that "the Fredo of the [Bush] family is the president of the United States, so why doesn't his brother take him out for a little fishing and let him say some Hail Marys ... and 'Boom!'" In other words, why not just assassinate the president?

"Americans are ultimately skeptical of media commentators who seem to have a political agenda that supersedes their search for the truth," Michael Harrison, of *Talkers*, says. The history of radio suggests that connoisseurs of that kind of talk usually wind up like the Athenians—vanquished and all too aware that real battles are not won with words. ▲

*Joshua Green is a senior editor of* The Atlantic.


GO INSIDE THE IVY TOWERS

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THE ART OF POLICY

# Incumbent-Protection Acts

*Campaign-finance reform—an explanation*

BY P. J. O'ROURKE

We have held our first cleaned-up national elections under the McCain-Feingold Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002. The act banned "soft money"—money previously exempt from federal campaign-contribution limits. Individuals and organizations can no longer make unlimited donations to political parties for "party-building activities." Such activities might have included producing vituperative TV ads calling a decorated-war-hero senator a goldbrick, or sponsoring hysterical Web sites accusing the president's father of being King Faisal's fifth wife.

Under our freshly purified electoral system individuals and organizations had to do that themselves. They used 527 committees, named after a section of the U.S. tax code that allows tax-free political advocacy as long as it doesn't go too far and, well, advocate a politician. One suspects that some of the 527s were cheating.

This will be fixed soon. The usual suspects behind campaign reform have introduced legislation to eliminate the 527 version of soft money. Two congressmen have sued the Federal Election Commission for failing to regulate 527s. And the FEC itself has imposed restrictions on 527s beginning this year.

Further laws and lawsuits will be needed to regulate the political advocacy of slovenly, loudmouthed leftist filmmakers, wild-eyed evangelicals raving from pulpits, and you and me. Politics must be freed from the corruption of money.

We have a ways to go. Last year, for the first time, victorious campaigns for the House cost an average of more than $1 million. Outlays for victorious Senate campaigns rose by 47 percent. Total spending on presidential, Senate, and House races was almost $4 billion, versus approximately $3 billion in 2000, before McCain-Feingold.

Thus McCain-Feingold has not been a success. Unless it has. Americans are 33 percent more politically involved than they were four years ago, if we measure involvement in dollars. And an extra billion in campaign funds raised despite onerous new restrictions is an example of the ingenuity and flexibility that make our democracy successful, even if it is corrupted by money.

The word "corruption" comes from the Latin *rumpere*, "to break." Anyone who has experienced the politics of a volunteer board, a social club, or a college English department knows that politics is cracked and fractured, money be damned. Humbugs and Hitlers say politics makes people whole.

Is there too much money in politics? There are some 209 million Americans of voting age. The 2004 presidential campaigns spent about $1.2 billion. Would you sell your vote for $5.74? (Well, last year, yes—if it would have made the candidates go away.)

Do the possessors of money wield too much influence? They do at the mall, doubtless likewise in politics. Yet telecommunications companies, some of America's richest corporations, are pestered by the government while agriculture—making up less than 1.5 percent of GDP—is amply subsidized.

It would take a Bill Clinton's worth of political knowledge to understand how this policy results from campaign corruption. Interestingly, it's a holdover Clinton appointee, Bradley A. Smith, who is the nation's most eloquent critic of campaign reform. More interestingly, Smith is a member of the Federal Election Commission. He believes that all restrictions on campaign giving and spending are violations of the First Amendment. Not a mere free-speech nut, Smith also believes that spending restrictions give too much power to the media. Smith called the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971 an "Incumbent Protection Act," because it limited big-giver seed money for unknown candidates. (In Washington they say that to run for office you need "a Rolex or a Rolodex.") Smith is even dubious about the disclosure of campaign contributions. He cites the 1958 Supreme Court ruling, in *NAACP* v. *Alabama*, that the anonymity of donors to a cause is protected by the First Amendment. Bradley Smith thinks we should ignore who gives what to whom and judge candidates by their ideals, ideas, and actions.

If that would help. The perpetuation of slavery, the exile and extermination of American Indians, and the passage of Jim Crow laws weren't carried out at the bidding of a few malefactors of great wealth. These policies had support among ordinary voters—the individual small-donor types that McCain-Feingold is supposed to encourage. And indeed, the number of individual donors to the populist Democratic Party rose nearly sevenfold in the 2004 election cycle. Of course, Democrats are all good, progressive people nowadays. So we should just restrict campaign contributions from bad, regressive special interests.

We've been trying since 1757, when George Washington, running for the Virginia House of Burgesses, was criticized for serving a quart and a half of liquor to each voter. Under progressive Democratic administrations campaign-finance-reform acts were passed in 1939, 1943, 1947, and 1967. But wait. Under selfish, special-interest-dominated Republican administrations campaign-finance-reform acts were passed in 1883, 1907, 1910, 1911, 1925, 1971, 1974, and 2002. No less a mossback than Barry Goldwater once co-sponsored a bill to cap donations by political-action committees.

Neither liberal nor conservative politicians can resist the temptation to stand as mighty sequoias of rectitude amid the lowly underbrush of fund-raising. But, says the political strategist Ralph Reed, "money is like water down the side of the mountain. It will find a way to get around the trees."

*P. J. O'Rourke is a correspondent for* The Atlantic.



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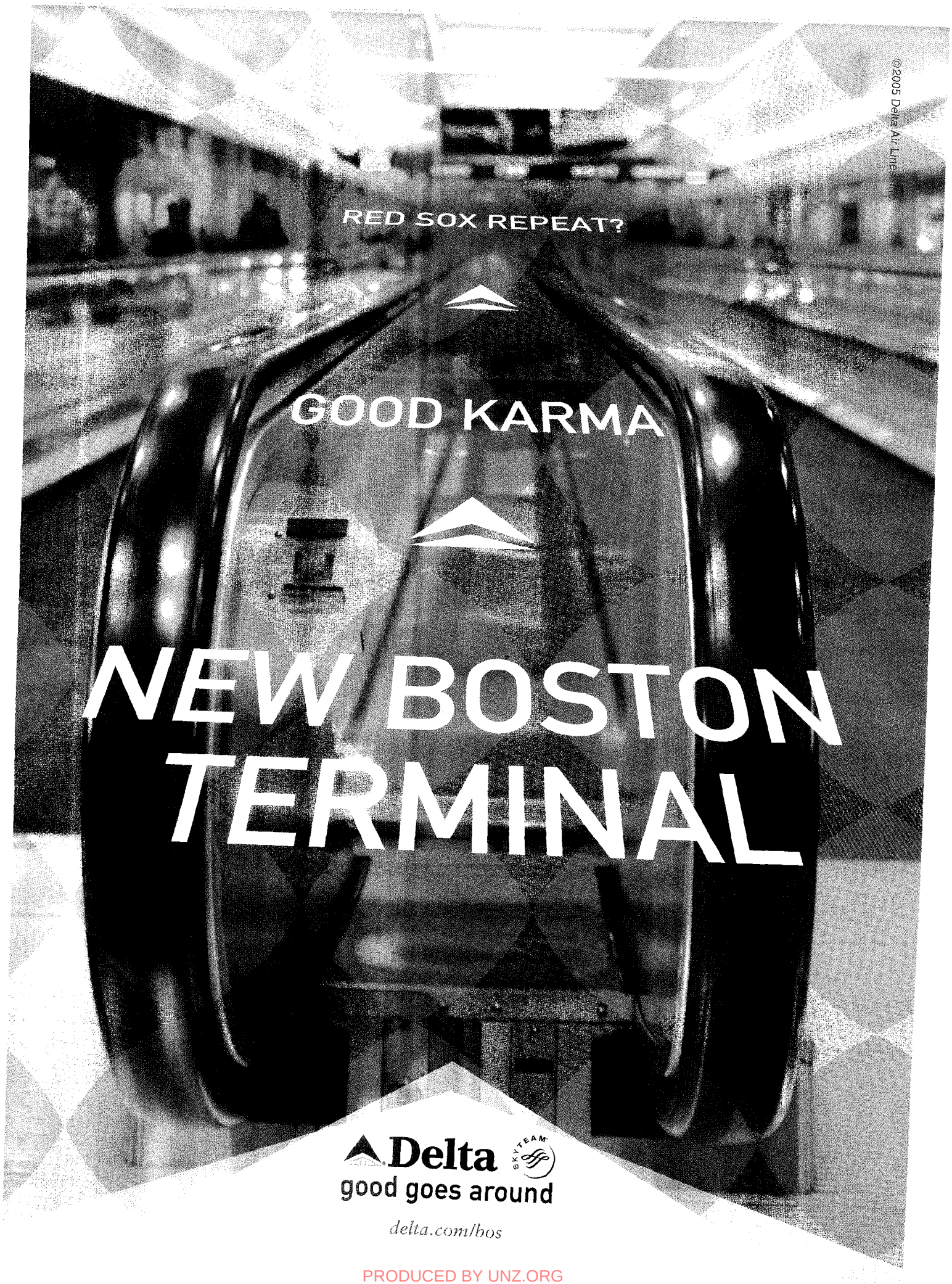


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CROSS-EXAMINATION

# Confirmation Class

*Most of what we learn from confirmation hearings for a Supreme Court chief justice will be misleading or irrelevant*

BY BENJAMIN WITTES

**The Senate will soon need to gear up to hold confirmation proceedings for a new chief justice of the United States. Any advice for the Judiciary Committee?**

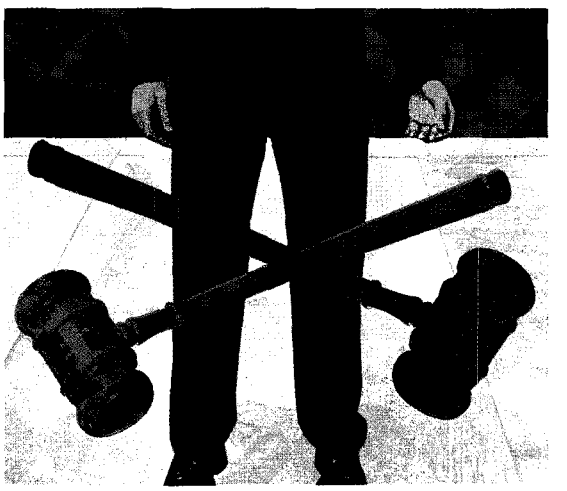
Oh, just skip them. Unless President Bush commits an act of true statesmanship in nominating the next head of the federal judiciary, the confirmation process is going to be an ugly spectacle. Democrats will wax indignant about a "rollback" of the hard-won gains of the civil-rights movement—indeed, of our fundamental rights more generally. Republicans will whip themselves into a frenzy over the impropriety of opposing nominees because of their "ideology." Some poor nominee will have his or her name dragged through the mud. If the Democrats successfully filibuster, we may have to repeat the whole process with another candidate. And after all the fuss, Bush will get what he wants anyway: a conservative chief justice. Why don't we dispense with the song and dance?

**Are you serious?**

Almost. The Constitution requires that the Senate offer advice and consent on nominees, so there has to be some advising and consenting. And the Senate acts as a potentially important check on presidential power. The trouble is that there's no reason to be confident that the probing will prove valuable. In fact, looking back at the six most recent chief justices, one is struck by how little light the Senate proceedings shed, either on the sort of justices they would be or on the defining issues they would face. The Senate never gets it right.

**That's a bold claim. How do you justify it?**

Start, for example, with Charles Evans Hughes, whom Herbert Hoover named chief justice in 1930. Hughes had been a justice before, but had stepped down in 1916 to run for president against Woodrow Wilson. And he had spent the intervening years as, among other things, the country's leading advocate before the Supreme Court, representing big business during an era of great (and now discredited) judicial solicitude for its interests. Hughes was undeniably well qualified for the job, but his nomination became the focus of an intense, and very modern-seeming, ideological dispute. Progressives of both parties opposed his nomination, because they did not want to strengthen the conservative majority on the Court or to bolster



its enthusiasm for expanding property rights and restraining government regulation. As William E. Borah, a Republican from Idaho, put it on the Senate floor, opponents objected to "placing upon the court as Chief Justice one whose views are known upon these vital and important questions and whose views, in my opinion, however sincerely entertained, are not views which ought to be incorporated in and made a permanent part of our legal and economic system."

Hughes, to be sure, was no liberal, but his opponents turned out to have seriously misjudged him. After winning confirmation by a vote of 52 to 26, Hughes guided the Court out of its era of conservative activism: by the time he retired, in 1941, the Court had backed away from its overly aggressive scrutiny of government regulation. And his leadership was crucial in defeating Franklin D. Roosevelt's court-packing scheme as well. He is today remembered as one of America's great chief justices.

**Okay, so maybe the Senate debate on Hughes turned out to be largely irrelevant. But that's just one example.**

The two chief justices who followed Hughes actually sailed through with no confirmation debate at all, so we didn't learn anything whatsoever in the process. The transcript of the judiciary subcommittee's hearing for Harlan F. Stone, who was confirmed just before America became engulfed in World War II, is only two pages long; nobody in the country asked to testify against him. The nomination of Fred Vinson, who succeeded Stone in 1946, left scarcely more of a record. Both men were confirmed within days.

**But what about the famously liberal Earl Warren? There must have been objections to him.**

Indeed there were—but mostly for what turned out to be the wrong reasons. Dwight Eisenhower installed Warren, then the governor of California, on the Court temporarily by recess appointment—a common procedure at the time that would be unthinkable today. But Warren's confirmation for the permanent job was delayed for several months by the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, who was irritated at the White House over unrelated matters. Consequently, the committee—encouraged by southern senators who feared that Warren would help overturn segregation—heard scurrilous ethics charges against him (in one instance from a fugitive from justice) and even prompted an FBI investigation. It also heard from a liberal interest group called the California and National Institute of Social Welfare, which charged that Warren had a "much too casual concern for



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PHENOMENON

## A SPOUSE IN THE HOUSE

When Representative Robert Matsui (D-Calif.) died, on January 1, his wife, Doris, faced a question most widows don't have to: Did she want her husband's job?

Both political parties have a gracious tradition of embracing congressional widows. No fewer than three now serve in Congress: Representatives Mary Bono (R-Calif.), Lois Capps (D-Calif.), and Jo Ann Emerson (R-Mo.) all won the seat of a deceased husband. (Unlike the Senate, which usually fills sudden vacancies by appointment, the House holds special elections in such cases.) California, frequently the incubator of political trends, launched the widow phenomenon more than eighty years ago, when Mae Ella Nolan pursued and won the seat of her late husband, John. (During her brief tenure in Congress she became the first woman to chair a House committee.)

Doris Matsui decided that she, too, wished to succeed her husband, and she'll be up for a vote on March 8 (and possibly again in a runoff on May 3, if no candidate wins by a majority). The record of congressional widows who have run before her is an astounding 36–2—better even than the record of Karl Rove.

It's not hard to understand why party officials and voters find a widow nearly irresistible. To begin with, there's the sympathy factor. And a widow has the advantage of a familiar surname—critical in the typically abbreviated campaigns that precede a special election. Certainly a mourning wife campaigning to carry on her husband's legacy is daunting to would-be challengers. And support from the party establishment is nearly always a given—born of the desire to honor a colleague, but also part of a cold-blooded calculation to maintain control of the seat. "[Widows] have everything going for them in that moment," says Debbie Walsh, the director of the Center for American Women and Politics, at Rutgers University. (Widowers may be more resistible: the only time a husband sought his late wife's congressional seat, he was opposed by thirty-seven challengers, and lost.)

Politically speaking, Doris Matsui has drawn an inside straight. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi endorsed her

as soon as she announced her candidacy—an unambiguous sign that the party leadership did not wish to see a challenger. Top-flight Democratic candidates who had initially expressed an interest took a pass.

But not every widow enjoys such treatment. In 1999 House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt refused to clear the Democratic field for Marta Macias Brown, widow of the California representative George Brown. She faced nine challengers in the special election and lost (though only by 518 votes).

As the record suggests, many voters make an emotional connection between a deceased congressman and his wife. This can be difficult for a widow to ignore. "People come to them and say, 'Please carry the fallen standard for us,'" says the Democratic pollster Fred Yang, who is working on Matsui's campaign. "A lot of these women are identified as part of their husband's career."

In many cases, though, the women decide to pass along the standard soon. Despite their initial success at the polls, half the widows elected to fill out their husbands' terms do not seek re-election.

—CHRIS CILLIZZA

the American Constitution" and that his "22 year career as a prosecuting attorney" had "habituated him to certain attitudes towards the rights of the individual which render him unfit to be the custodian of the Constitution of the United States." These are comments, remember, about a man who went on to lead the Court through its greatest period of liberal and civil-libertarian energy. (As it turned out, McCarthyite groups, which testified against Warren's confirmation because he had vetoed legislation requiring loyalty oaths for California teachers, had a better read on him than the liberals did. The Warren Court famously protected the First Amendment rights of Communists.)

What did not arise openly in the proceedings, however, was the matter of school desegregation. Yet *Brown* v. *Board of Education* had already been argued before the high court (and in fact before Warren himself), and it would become—within less than three months of Warren's official confirmation—the defining case not only of Warren's tenure but of twentieth-century American jurisprudence. Nothing in Warren's hearings—which ended with a unanimous confirmation—remotely anticipated the revolutionary qualities of his Court. Despite the considerable energy expended by the Senate, at the end of the proceedings senators had little more idea what they were getting than they did after waving through Vinson and Stone.

**But in more recent years nominees for chief justice have themselves testified before the Judiciary Committee. Hasn't this made the Senate's inquiry more enlightening?**

Afraid not. Take the nomination of Warren Burger, who followed Earl Warren in 1969. Burger's hearing was full of fawning questions from Judiciary Committee members who treated this ordinary man as though he were a legal giant. They asked him no challenging questions, and they confirmed him confident that he would curtail the rights-creating enthusiasm of the Warren Court. There was no glimmer of the pomposity and mediocrity that Burger would display as chief justice,



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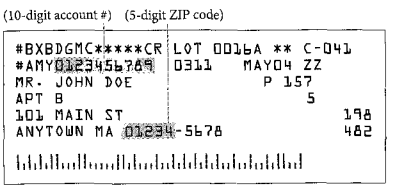


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or of the imperiousness and the technical sloppiness that would so irritate his colleagues. What's more, although Burger was a conservative, the Court under his leadership saw not the ebb of Warren Court activism but its apogee. It was the Burger Court, after all, that struck down abortion laws and the death penalty—and Burger himself was part of the majority in *Roe* v. *Wade*, which remains the ultimate conservative judicial bugaboo.

**Okay, but I remember the 1986 fight over William Rehnquist, and nothing about his tenure as chief justice during the Court's recent conservative resurgence has surprised me. You can't claim that the Rehnquist hearings failed to anticipate the Rehnquist Court.**

Yes, I can. The Senate did hold lengthy and contentious hearings over Rehnquist. But the issues aired at those hearings had almost nothing to do with the subsequent conservatism of the Rehnquist Court. Senators spent hours quizzing Rehnquist about whether, as a Supreme Court clerk in 1954, he had opposed the *Brown* decision; whether he had harassed minority voters in Arizona in the 1960s; why there were restrictive covenants on properties he owned; and whether he improperly failed to recuse himself in a particular case. The overarching charges against him—prominently featured in the Democratic dissent from the committee's report on his nomination—were that he was insensitive to minorities and that black civil rights were unsafe in his hands.

Yet the rhetoric of today's liberal groups notwithstanding, the Rehnquist Court simply hasn't curtailed the gains of the civil-rights era. State-sponsored segregation and discrimination, unanimously struck down beginning half a century ago, would be unanimously rejected now as well. And though individual discrimination cases may be fiercely contested, the civil-rights laws today are particularly well defined and uncontroversial. The only major question still seriously debated is how aggressively government may seek to favor minorities through affirmative action.

On the other hand, the issues that have come to define the Rehnquist Court went almost completely unremarked in the lengthy hearings and floor debates over its chief. For example, the relationship between state and federal power came up only fleetingly—though shifting the balance of what the Court quaintly calls "our federalism" away from the national government has been one of the most important themes of Rehnquist's nearly two-decade tenure. Similarly, the Senate devoted surprisingly little attention to criminal law, which has been greatly altered by the Court's recent conservatism. In short, a senator opposing Rehnquist (who was confirmed 65–33) on the basis of those proceedings would have had a general sense of him as unacceptably conservative, but would have entirely misapprehended the likely consequences of that conservatism (which in any event was no secret even before the Senate's inquiry began).

**Okay, you've convinced me: the confirmation process is useless.**

Well, not entirely. On a practical level it allows the Senate to weed out an ethically impaired candidate such as Abe Fortas, whose nomination to replace Earl Warren was blocked over allegations of financial impropriety and cronyism. And the Senate's involvement in confirming nominees preserves the legitimacy of the Court itself, ensuring that it does not become a wholly owned subsidiary of the executive branch.

Also, whether or not the hearings prove informative, the Senate's ability to stop a nominee provides a check on the president. President Bush knows that he'll have a fight on his hands if he sends up a die-hard right-winger. And although it's impossible to divine from the proceedings how a given justice will evolve over time, or what issues will define his tenure, the president's awareness of the possibility of Senate rejection encourages accommodation and consensus. The major value of the Senate's proceedings, in other words, lies not in anything we might learn from them—which, if history is any guide, will be negligible—but in the president's knowledge that they happen at all.

*Benjamin Wittes is an editorial writer at* The Washington Post.



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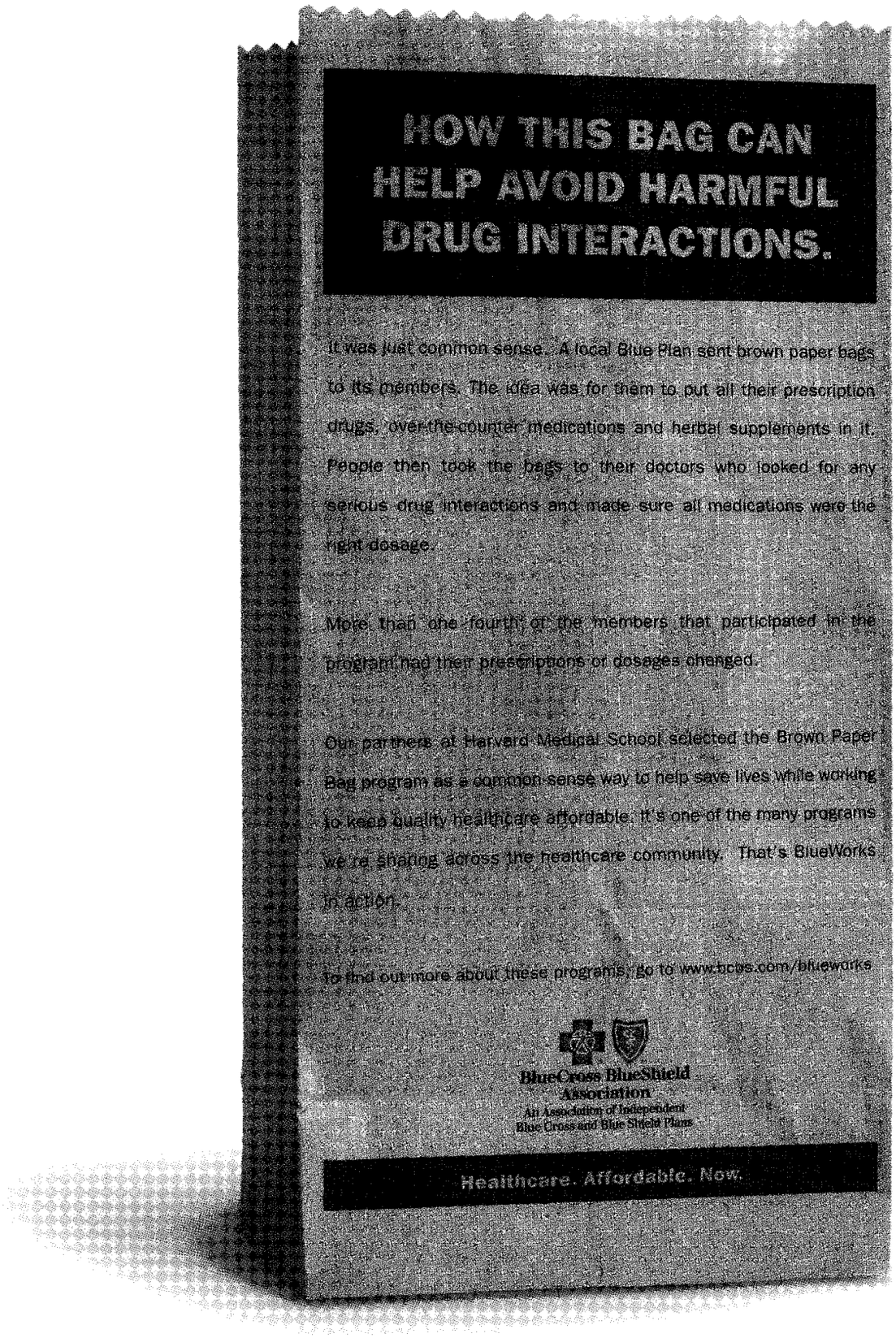


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# Primary Sources

*Smart women stay single; why religious Americans fear Muslims; Israel's surprisingly bright demographic future; are the left-handed better in a fight?*

SOCIETY

## Too Smart to Marry

The bad news is coming fast for brainy career women. For one thing, they're less likely to get married—perhaps because (according to a study recently published in the journal *Evolution and Human Behavior*) men prefer to date and marry women who occupy subordinate positions in the workplace, or because (according to a survey carried out by four British universities) female intelligence itself reduces the odds of wedlock. (The latter study found that for every 15-point increase in IQ score above the average, women's likelihood of marrying fell by almost 60 percent.) And another study, led by a professor at Ohio State University, suggests that women who do get married and have children will see their job prospects diminish. Two hundred undergraduates were asked to make hiring and promotion recommendations for a law firm based on résumés that differed only as to sex and whether the applicant was married with children. The result: women with children were less likely to be hired and promoted than either men or childless women, whereas men with children were actually favored in hiring over their childless male counterparts.

—"Relational Dominance and Mate-Selection Criteria: Evidence That Males Attend to Female Dominance," Stephanie L. Brown and Brian P. Lewis, *Evolution and Human Behavior*; "Childhood IQ and Marriage by Mid-life: the Scottish Mental Survey 1932 and the Midspan Studies," *Personality and Individual Differences*; "Mothers and Fathers in the Workplace: How Gender and Parental Status Influence Judgments of Job-Related Competence," *Journal of Social Issues*

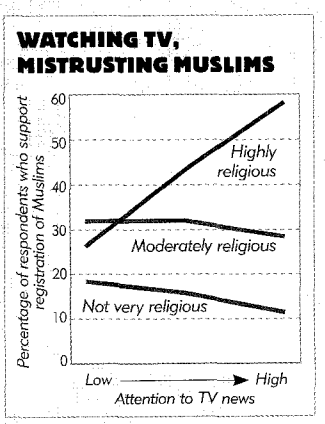
## The Morning After

When the idea of making Plan B, the so-called morning-after pill, available over the counter in America was introduced, last year, advocates predicted that it would reduce the risk of unwanted pregnancy, while opponents predicted that it would encourage risky sexual behavior. Now the results of a trial study of San Francisco–area women aged fifteen to twenty-four, published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, suggest that both predictions were wrong: among the women studied—none of whom intended to get pregnant—neither sexual activity nor conception was affected by the relative ease of access to the pill. Results were the same among those who were given the pill in advance, those who were instructed to pick it up over the counter at a designated pharmacy, and those who were told to get a prescription from a local clinic. About 40 percent of the women in each group reported having unprotected sex, and eight percent in each of the three groups became pregnant. The women who had unprotected sex are part of a national trend: according to the latest government health study on contraceptive use, the proportion of women aged fifteen to forty-four who weren't trying to get pregnant but nevertheless had sex without using birth control in the months surveyed rose from about 5.5 percent in 1995 to about 7.5 percent in 2002—a small but statistically significant increase.

—"Direct Access to Emergency Contraception Through Pharmacies and Effect on Unintended Pregnancy and STIs," *JAMA*; "Use of Contraception and Use of Family Planning Services in the United States: 1982–2002," National Center for Health Statistics

## Suspicious Minds

Jesus taught Christians to "love thy neighbor." According to a recent survey by researchers at Cornell University, however, the more religious the American, the less likely he is to love (or at least trust) his Muslim neighbors. For instance, 42 percent of the highly religious (versus only 15 percent of citizens who are "not very religious") believe that American Muslims should have to register their whereabouts with the government; 34 percent (versus 13 percent) say that U.S. mosques should be monitored; and 40 percent (versus 19 percent) look favorably on government infiltration of Islamic civic and volunteer organizations. The highly religious are also more distrustful the more attention they pay to TV news. While it's true that all the 9/11 terrorists were Muslims, none of them were Americans. So why do the religious mistrust American Muslims? The survey contains a hint: 65 percent of "highly religious" Americans believe that Islam is more likely than other faiths to encourage violence.




—"Restrictions on Civil Liberties, Views of Islam, and Muslim Americans," Media & Society Research Group, Cornell University

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

## Overestimating the Palestinians

For some time now Israel has been haunted by fears of demographic doom—fears that a swelling Arab population, both in the Palestinian territories and in Israel itself, will make the Jewish state politically untenable. Now a team of American and Israeli researchers insists that those fears are based on dramatic overestimates of present-day Palestinian population size and birth rates. These overestimates, they argue, are derived from 1997 projections of the Palestine Bureau of Statistics (rather than from actual population counts), which predicted that the Palestinian population would grow by four to five percent a year, and that the occupied territories would experience net immigration. In fact, judging from birth data and border entry/exit data, Palestinian birth rates have dropped far below the projected level, while the West Bank and Gaza have experienced net emigration. The authors estimate the actual Palestinian population at about 2.4 million—not 3.8 million, as commonly asserted. And overall, they add, the Jewish share of the population in Israel and the occupied territories has declined only slightly over the past forty years, from 64 percent in 1967 to just under 60 percent today. Pointing out that Palestinian birth rates are con-



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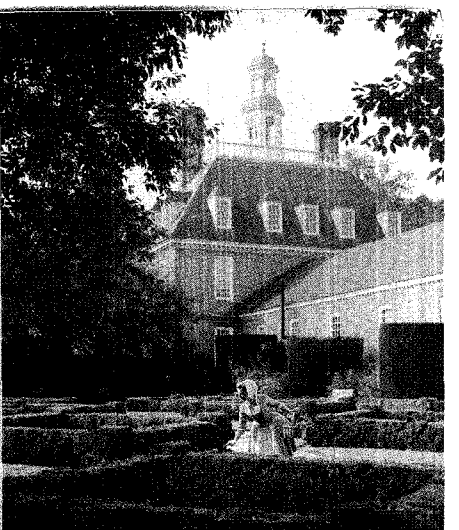

*Her hydrangeas, the pride of all Virginia.*

*She shaped a maze from the finest boxwood, and from within,*

*stole kisses from her love.*

*Her next creation?*

*A topiary unicorn. Oooh.*

*The homeowners' association won't like that.*

*Vacation packages, including the Colonial Gardens package, are detailed in the new 2005 Colonial Williamsburg Vacation Planner and are featured on our website. To receive a copy of the planner, or to make reservations, visit ColonialWilliamsburg.com or call us at 1-800-HISTORY.*

*Connect with your inner 18th century.*

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tinuing to decline, the authors conclude that there's little reason to expect Jews to become a minority in the Israeli-controlled region—let alone within Israel proper—anytime soon.

—"Arab Population in the West Bank and Gaza: The Million-and-a-half Person Gap," Bennett Zimmerman, Yoram Ettinger, et al.

## The Once and Future Caliphate

China and India rising, globalization disrupting societies but lifting most boats, an expanding EU with an expanding Muslim population—these are the fairly conventional forecasts offered by the National Intelligence Council in its latest report, "Mapping the Global Future." Less well-grounded but more interesting are the report's "fictional scenarios" for the world fifteen years from now. These include an imaginary diary entry by a UN secretary-general, a text-message exchange by two would-be dealers in weapons of mass destruction, and a letter from a World Economic Forum head on the eve of the 2020 Davos meeting. The most compelling—and unnerving—of these scenarios is titled "A New Caliphate": it envisions a future in which a young and charismatic religious leader is proclaimed the new caliph, setting off convulsions across the Muslim world and into the West. The would-be ruler of all Islam soon claims pockets of followers in most Muslim countries; Pakistan and Afghanistan are plunged into civil war; Muslim athletes proclaim their loyalty to the caliphate at the Olympics; and—in what is perhaps the report's most realistic touch—"histories of early Caliphs suddenly [rise] to be bestsellers on Amazon.com."

—"Mapping the Global Future," National Intelligence Council

SCIENCE & NATURE

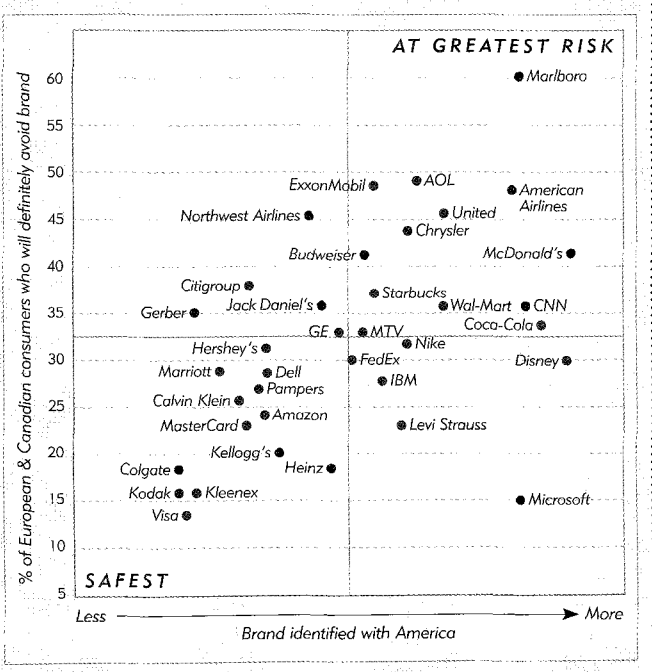
## Booze and Consequences

Homer Simpson once called alcohol "the cause of, and solution to, all of life's problems." Recent studies offer evidence to buttress that assertion in its entirety. A glass of beer or wine a day may sharpen your mind, according to a *New England Journal of Medicine* study, which reports that women who imbibed daily lowered their risk of memory loss and senility in old age by about 15 percent. But too much alcohol (enough to acquire a pair of "beer goggles," shall we say?) has different and less desirable consequences—or so suggests a study by three NBER economists, which finds that disincentives to drink may significantly reduce gonorrhea rates among young men. Working with infection data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the authors report that every 10 percent increase in the excise tax on beer reduces the gonorrhea rate by 4.7 percent among males aged fifteen to nineteen, and by 4.1 percent among those aged twenty to twenty-four. In addition, males aged fifteen to nineteen in states with zero-tolerance drunk-driving laws had gonorrhea rates seven to eight percent lower than those of males in other states. (Interestingly, neither factor had a significant impact on female infection rates.) For those who don't know when to say when, perhaps a compromise is in order—namely, non-alcoholic beer, which is neither mind-sharpening nor STD-increasing but may, according to a Japanese study using lab mice, offer protection against cancer.

—"Alcohol Consumption and Cognition," *NEJM*; "An Investigation of the Effects of Alcohol Policies on Youth STDs," NBER; "Inhibitory Effects of Heterocyclic Amine-Induced DNA Adduct Formation in Mouse Liver and Lungs by Beer," *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*

BUSINESS

## Our Brands, Ourselves




The U.S. government isn't all that's taking a public-relations hit overseas these days: U.S. brands are hurting as well, according to a study of European and Canadian consumers conducted by the market-research company GMI. Roughly 20 percent of people surveyed reported consciously avoiding American products in response to U.S. foreign policy. The brands most at risk, the study noted, are those that have "America" or "American" in their name (such as AOL and American Airlines) or are considered quintessentially American (such as Coca-Cola and McDonald's).

—"Half of European Consumers Distrust American Companies," GMI Poll

## Sinister Findings

Unless you're trying to fill out your bullpen for a post-season run, the evolutionary usefulness of left-handedness may seem a little puzzling. But it turns out that southpaws may remain in the gene pool because they're good to have around in a fight. A study by two French academics tracked the prevalence of left-handedness across a variety of traditional societies, and found that the more violent ones tended to have a higher percentage of lefties. Among the Dioula people of Burkina Faso, for instance, the homicide rate is just 0.013 murders per thousand inhabitants per year, and left-handers make up only 3.4 percent of the population. In contrast, the more warlike Yanomamo of the Venezuelan rain forest have a homicide rate of four per thousand per year, and southpaws compose roughly 23 percent of their population. What's advantageous in baseball, it turns out, may also be advantageous in a jungle knife fight.

—"Handedness, Homicide and Negative Frequency-Dependent Selection," Charlotte Faurie and Michel Raymond, Institute of Evolutionary Sciences, University Montpellier II

*Compiled by Ross Douthat, Nathan Littlefield, and Marshall Poe. For links to the reports and documents discussed in these pages visit* www.theatlantic.com/doc/200504/primarysources



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THE WORLD IN NUMBERS

# Crude Politics

*The United States, China, and the race for oil security*

Ever since Lord Curzon, a member of Britain's World War I cabinet, declared that the Allies "had floated to victory on a sea of oil," major industrialized powers have sought oil security.

An imperialist surge by Japan to secure oil supplies in East Asia resulted in the fateful attack on Pearl Harbor. The desire to control Middle East oil pushed the Soviet Union into Afghanistan, and drove Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. And in his 1980 State of the Union speech President Jimmy Carter made clear America's own oil-security policy when he described what would become known as the Carter doctrine: "Any attempt by an outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America."

Today the Soviet Union is no more, and Saddam Hussein is behind bars, but the United States faces a new threat to its oil security: China, whose thirst for oil may outstrip ours as soon as 2020. In 2003 China overtook Japan as the world's second largest oil consumer; the increase in demand helped send global oil prices skyrocketing. As demand continues to rise, and as oil production threatens to peak in the coming decades, China and the United States—which together consumed 33 percent of the oil produced last year—are engaged in a contest for preferred access to remaining reserves.

The accompanying map shows the agreements and military ties that each of the major oil-producing states in the Eastern Hemisphere—the primary area of contention between the two powers—has with China and the United States. Few producers lack the attention of at least one suitor; both have promiscuously sought arrangements to ensure against disruptions in oil supply.

Although the U.S. strategy is based not on physically controlling oil fields but, rather, on maintaining a stable price for crude oil on the global market, oil-producing regions are thick with U.S. military bases—and in Nigeria, Kazakhstan, and several other countries, U.S. troops are working with local militaries to protect oil infrastructure. Military aid is also used to woo tinpot oil regimes, opening the door for U.S. companies such as ExxonMobil and ChevronTexaco to invest in local fields.

Late to the game and largely unable to compete with the U.S. military, China has sought to meet its energy needs by making use of its newfound economic clout—most notably by buying drilling and refining rights throughout the world. Its state-owned oil companies have spent hundreds of billions of dollars on such rights, often at high premiums; since 1993 China has invested in more than fifty oil and gas projects in some thirty nations. In particular, China has focused on acquisitions and partnerships in pariah nations—Sudan, Iran—where the United States has refused to tread. In Sudan alone China has reportedly spent $15 billion developing oil fields.

Yet China, too, has begun to use its military to protect its investments and—indirectly—to open new oil markets. Reportedly, troops disguised as oil workers patrol Chinese oil infrastructure in Sudan. And in recent years China has consolidated its military presence in oil- and gas-rich parts of the South China Sea, sovereignty over which is disputed.

### THE WESTERN FRONT

China has been busy cutting deals in America's back yard. In return for cooperation on oil projects, China has lent support to Brazil's bid for a UN Security Council seat. President Hugo Chavez, of Venezuela, eager to reduce dependence on the United States, has invited Chinese oil companies to explore Venezuela's oil fields and build refineries, and has proposed new pipelines to the Pacific that would make delivery to Asia cheaper. With an eye toward the vast tar-sand reserves of Canada, which are second only to Saudi Arabia in recoverable oil but with production costs more than ten times as high, China is aggressively negotiating with Canadian oil companies.

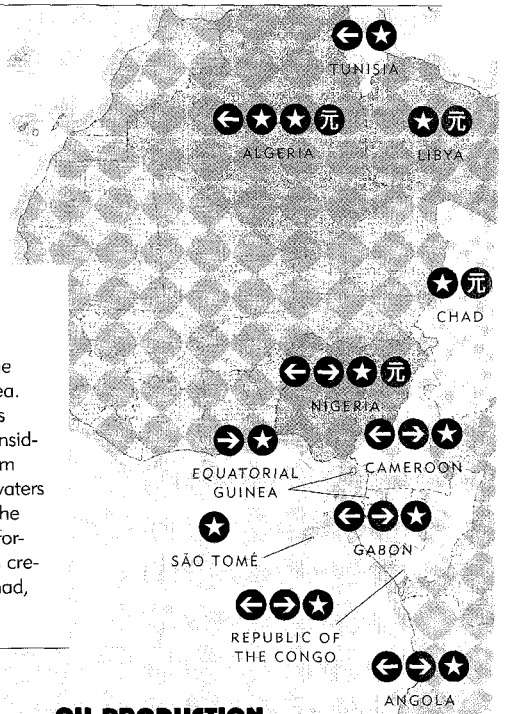
### THE SPOILS OF OIL

*Oil-producing countries' relationships with the U.S. and China*

- Exports oil to U.S.
- Exports oil to China
- Buys arms / receives military aid from U.S.
- Buys arms / receives military aid from China
- U.S. military bases
- 元 Chinese investment in oil infrastructure

### OIL'S NEW FRONTIER

The tiny island nation of São Tomé, off the coast of West Africa, symbolizes the importance that the United States places on the oil-rich Gulf of Guinea. As Western oil companies look to tap São Tomé's newly discovered oil fields, the U.S. military is considering establishing a naval base on the island, from which it could patrol the strategically important waters off West Africa's major oil producers. Further to the north, U.S. companies are sprinting back to the former pariah nation of Libya. China, meanwhile, is creating new oil-import agreements with Gabon, Chad, and the Republic of the Congo.




### OIL PRODUCTION

*Barrels per day, 2003*

- >7.5 million
- 1 million–4 million
- 500,000–1 million
- <500,000

SOURCES: BP STATISTICAL REVIEW OF WORLD ENERGY; U.S. ENERGY INFORMATION AGENCY; CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH [illegible]



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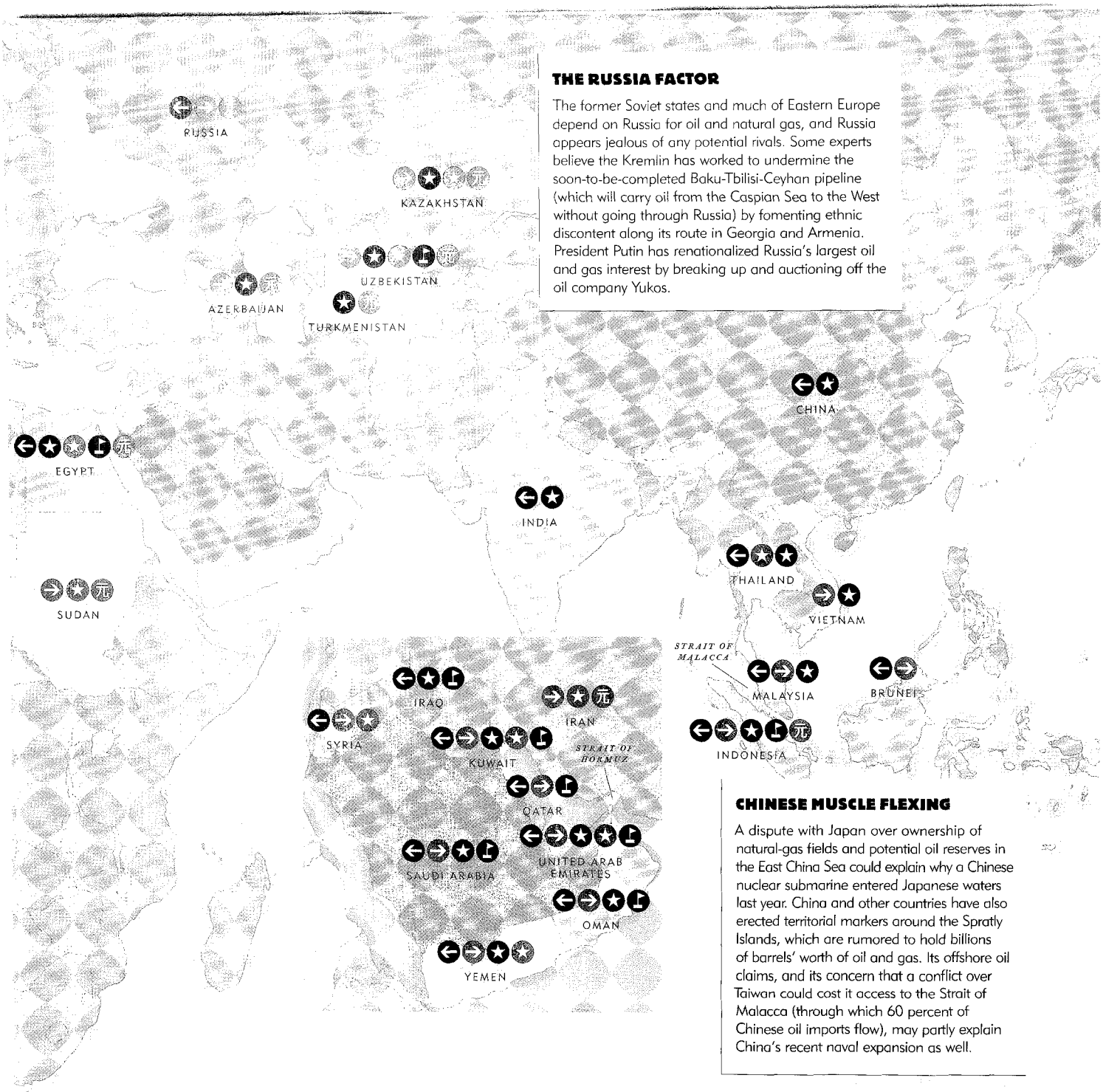


### THE RUSSIA FACTOR

The former Soviet states and much of Eastern Europe depend on Russia for oil and natural gas, and Russia appears jealous of any potential rivals. Some experts believe the Kremlin has worked to undermine the soon-to-be-completed Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline (which will carry oil from the Caspian Sea to the West without going through Russia) by fomenting ethnic discontent along its route in Georgia and Armenia. President Putin has renationalized Russia's largest oil and gas interest by breaking up and auctioning off the oil company Yukos.

### CHINESE MUSCLE FLEXING

A dispute with Japan over ownership of natural-gas fields and potential oil reserves in the East China Sea could explain why a Chinese nuclear submarine entered Japanese waters last year. China and other countries have also erected territorial markers around the Spratly Islands, which are rumored to hold billions of barrels' worth of oil and gas. Its offshore oil claims, and its concern that a conflict over Taiwan could cost it access to the Strait of Malacca (through which 60 percent of Chinese oil imports flow), may partly explain China's recent naval expansion as well.

INSTITUTE FOR ANALYSIS OF GLOBAL SECURITY; U.S.-CHINA ECONOMIC & SECURITY REVIEW COMMISSION; U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT; AND VARIOUS PRESS REPORTS

Perhaps most significant in the short term is China's relationship with Iran. It is a matter of simple mathematics that neither China nor the United States will be able to avoid reliance on the Middle East, where three countries—Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Iran—sit on nearly half of the world's easily accessible oil. With Saudi Arabia and Iraq clearly within the U.S. sphere of influence, China has been steadily courting Tehran and aims to become the biggest buyer of Iranian oil. In return for oil, China has supplied weapons—most notably anti-ship missiles, which Iran has aimed at the Strait of Hormuz, the busiest oil-export route in the world—and technology and materials that can be used for the manufacture of nuclear weapons.

Will oil concerns inside or outside the Middle East lead to open conflict between the United States and China? In the short run that's unlikely; even if the United States were to invade Iran, China probably couldn't do anything about it. But given oil's historical place in military conflicts between great powers, one cannot discount the possibility that over time, as demand for oil increases and supplies of crude become harder and more expensive to tap, the two nations will come to blows. In the meantime, China will probably continue to offer succor to rogue states that America would like to see isolated. And weapons of both Chinese and U.S. origin will continue to flow into regions where oil itself has already bred government corruption, vast income inequality, and civil unrest. —*MATTHEW YEOMANS*

*Matthew Yeomans is the author of* Oil: Anatomy of an Industry *and edits the oil blog www.petropulse.com.*



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*The engine production line at Toyota Motor Manufacturing, West Virginia.*

## It takes local talent to build world-class engines.

Since Toyota began building vehicles in the U.S. in 1986, we've been committed to investing in local manufacturing. Today in our eight U.S. plants, Toyota team members build engines, transmissions and cylinder heads, as well as more than one million quality cars and trucks a year.* And with two more manufacturing plants under construction, our growth will continue to be powered by local investment.

*Toyota components and vehicles are made using many U.S. sourced parts. ©2005

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TOYOTA

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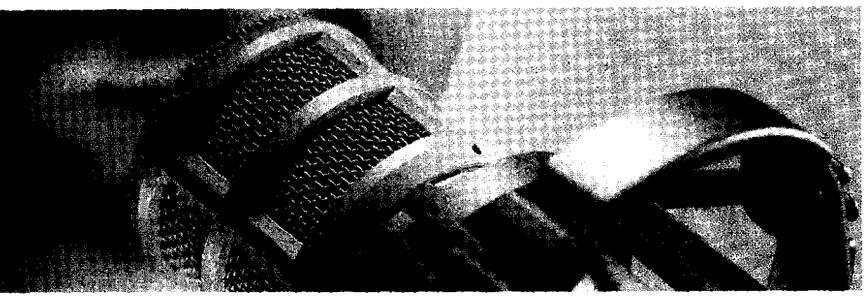
# HOST

BY DAVID FOSTER WALLACE



(1)

Mr. John Ziegler, thirty-seven, late of Louisville's WHAS, is now on the air, "Live and Local," from 10:00 P.M. to 1:00 A.M. every weeknight on southern California's KFI, a 50,000-watt megastation whose hourly ID and Sweeper, designed by the station's Imaging department and featuring a gravelly basso whisper against licks from Ratt's 1984 metal classic "Round and Round," is "KFI AM-640, Los Angeles—More *Stimulating* Talk Radio." This is either the eighth or ninth host job that Mr. Ziegler's had in his talk-radio career, and far and away the biggest. He moved out here to LA over Christmas—alone, towing a U-Haul—and found an apartment not far from KFI's studios, which are in an old part of the Koreatown district, near Wilshire Center.

The *John Ziegler Show* is the first local, nonsyndicated late-night program that KFI has aired in a long time. It's something of a gamble for everyone involved. Ten o'clock to one qualifies as late at night in southern California, where hardly anything reputable's open after nine.

It is currently right near the end of the program's second segment on the evening of May 11, 2004, shortly after Nicholas Berg's taped beheading by an al-Qaeda splinter in Iraq. Dressed, as is his custom, for golf, and wearing a white-billed cap w/corporate logo, Mr. Ziegler is seated by himself in the on-air studio, surrounded by monitors and sheaves of Internet downloads. He is trim, clean-shaven, and handsome in the somewhat bland way that top golfers and local TV newsmen tend to be. His eyes, which off-air are usually flat and unhappy, are alight now with passionate conviction. Only some of the studio's monitors concern Mr. Z.'s own program; the ones up near the ceiling take muted, closed-caption feeds from Fox News, MSNBC, and what might be C-SPAN. To his big desk's upper left is a wall-mounted digital clock that counts down seconds. His computer monitors' displays also show the exact time.

Across the soundproof glass of the opposite wall, another monitor in the Airmix room is running an episode of *The Simpsons*, also muted, which both the board op and the call screener are watching with half an eye.

Pendent in front of John Ziegler's face, attached to the same type of hinged, flexible stand as certain student desk lamps, is a Shure-brand broadcast microphone that is sheathed in a gray foam filtration sock to soften popped p's and hissed sibilants. It is into this microphone that the host speaks:

"And I'll tell you why—it's because we're *better* than they are."

A Georgetown B.A. in government and philosophy, scratch golfer, former TV sportscaster, possible world-class authority on the O.J. Simpson trial, and sometime contributor to MSNBC's *Scarborough Country*, Mr. Ziegler is referring here to America versus what he terms "the Arab world." It's near the end of his "churn," which is the industry term for a host's opening monologue, whose purpose is both to introduce a show's nightly topics and

RODNEY OMAN

FCC regulations require a station ID to be broadcast every hour. This ID comprises a station's call letters, band and frequency, and the radio market it's licensed to serve. Just about every serious commercial station (which KFI very much is) appends to its ID a Sweeper, which is the little tag line by which the station wishes to be known. KABC, the other giant AM talk station in Los Angeles, deploys the entendre-rich "Where America Comes First." KFI's own main Sweeper is "More *Stimulating* Talk Radio," but it's also got secondary Sweepers that it uses to intro the half-hour news, traffic updates at seventeen and forty-six past the hour, and station promos. "Southern California's Newsroom," "The Radio Home of Fox News," and "When You See News Break, Don't Try to Fix It Yourself—Leave That to Professionals" are the big three that KFI's running this spring. The content and sound of all IDs, Sweepers, and promos are the responsibility of the station's Imaging department, apparently so named because they involve KFI's image in the LA market. Imaging is sort of the radio version of branding—the Sweepers let KFI communicate its special personality and 'tude in a compressed way.

There are also separate, subsidiary tag lines that KFI develops specially for its local programs. The main two it's using for the *John Ziegler Show* so far are "Live and Local" and "Hot, Fresh Talk Served Nightly."

The whisperer turns out to be one Chris Corley, a voiceover actor best known for movie trailers. Corley's $C^2$ Productions is based in Fort Myers FL.

(By the standards of the U.S. radio industry this makes him almost movie-star gorgeous.)

*David Foster Wallace is the author of several books, including* Infinite Jest, A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again, *and* Oblivion.



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to get listeners emotionally stimulated enough that they're drawn into the program and don't switch away. More than any other mass medium, radio enjoys a captive audience—if only because so many of the listeners are driving—but in a major market there are dozens of AM stations to listen to, plus of course FM and satellite radio, and even a very seductive and successful station rarely gets more than a five or six percent audience share.

"We're not perfect, we suck a lot of the time, but we are *better* as a people, as a culture, and as a society than they are, and we need to recognize that, so that we can possibly even *begin* to deal with the evil that we are facing."

When Mr. Z.'s impassioned, his voice rises and his arms wave around (which obviously only those in the Airmix room can see). He also fidgets, bobs slightly up and down in his executive desk chair, and weaves. Although he must stay seated and can't pace around the room, the host does not have to keep his mouth any set distance from the microphone, since the board op, 'Mondo Hernandez, can adjust his levels on the mixing board's channel 7 so that Mr. Z.'s volume always stays in range and never peaks or fades. 'Mondo, whose price for letting outside parties hang around Airmix is one large bag of cool-ranch Doritos per evening, is an immense twenty-one-year-old man with a ponytail, stony Mesoamerican features, and the placid, grandmotherly eyes common to giant mammals everywhere. Keeping the studio signal from peaking is one of 'Mondo's prime directives, along with making sure that each of the program's scheduled commercial spots is loaded into Prophet and run at just the right time, whereupon he must confirm that the ad has run as scheduled in the special Airmix log he signs each page of, so that the station can bill advertisers for their spots. 'Mondo, who started out two years ago as an unpaid intern and now earns ten dollars an hour, works 7:00–1:00 on weeknights and also board-ops KFI's special cooking show on Sundays. As long as he's kept under forty hours a week, which he somehow always just barely is, the station is not obliged to provide 'Mondo with employee benefits.

The Nick Berg beheading and its Internet video compose what is known around KFI as a "Monster," meaning a story that has both high news value and tremendous emotional voltage. As is SOP in political talk radio, the emotions most readily accessed are anger, outrage, indignation, fear, despair, disgust, contempt, and a certain kind of apocalyptic glee, all of which the Nick Berg thing's got in spades. Mr. Ziegler, whose program is in only its fourth month at KFI, has been fortunate in that 2004 has already been chock-full of Monsters—Saddam's detention, the Abu Ghraib scandal, the Scott Peterson murder trial, the Greg Haidl gang-rape trial, and preliminary hearings in the rape trial of Kobe Bryant. But tonight is the most angry, indignant, disgusted, and impassioned that Mr. Z.'s gotten on-air so far, and the consensus in Airmix is that it's resulting in some absolutely first-rate talk radio.

John Ziegler, who is a talk-radio host of unflagging industry, broad general knowledge, mordant wit, and extreme conviction, makes a particular specialty of media criticism. One object of his disgust and contempt in the churn so far has been the U.S. networks' spineless, patronizing decision not to air the Berg videotape and thus to deny Americans "a true and accurate view of the barbarity, the utter *depravity*, of these people." Even more outrageous, to Mr. Z., is the mainstream media's lack of outrage about Berg's taped murder versus all that same media's hand-wringing and invective over the recent photos of alleged prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib prison, which he views as a clear indication of the deluded, blame-America-first

'Mondo's lay explanation of what peaking is consists of pointing at the red area to the right of the two volumeters' bobbing needles on the mixing board: "It's when the needles go into the red." The overall mission, apparently, is to keep the volume and resonance of a host's voice high enough to be stimulating but not so high that they exceed the capacities of an AM analog signal or basic radio receiver. One reason why callers' voices sound so much less rich and authoritative than hosts' voices on talk radio is that it is harder to keep telephone voices from peaking.

Another reason is mike processing, which evens and fills out the host's voice, removing raspy or metallic tones, and occurs automatically in Airmix. There's no such processing for the callers' voices.

Prophet is the special OS for KFI's computer system—"like Windows for a radio station," according to Mr. Ziegler's producer.

Here is a sample bit of "What the *John Ziegler Show* is All About," a long editorial intro to the program that Mr. Ziegler delivered snippets of over his first several nights in January:

> The underlying premise of the *John Ziegler Show* is that, thanks to its socialistic leanings, incompetent media, eroding moral foundation, aging demographics, and undereducated masses, the United States, as we know it, is doomed. In my view, we don't know how much longer we still have to enjoy it, so we shouldn't waste precious moments constantly worrying or complaining about it. However, because not everyone in this country is yet convinced of this seemingly obvious reality, the show does see merit in pointing out or documenting the demise of our nation and will take great pains to do so. And because most everyone can agree that there is value in attempting to delay the sinking of the *Titanic* as long as possible, whenever feasible the *John Ziegler Show* will attempt to do its part to plug whatever holes in the ship it can. With that said, the show realizes that, no matter how successful it (or anyone else) may be in slowing the downfall of our society, the final outcome is still pretty much inevitable, so we might as well have a good time watching the place fall to pieces.

Be advised that the intro's stilted, term-paperish language, which looks kind of awful in print, is a great deal more effective when the spiel is delivered out loud—the stiffness gives it a slight air of self-mockery that keeps you from being totally sure just how seriously John Ziegler takes what he's saying. Meaning he gets to have it both ways. This half-pretend pretension, which is ingenious in all sorts of ways, was pioneered in talk radio by Rush Limbaugh, although with Limbaugh the semi–self-mockery is more tonal than syntactic.



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mentality of the U.S. press. It is an associated contrast between Americans' mortified response to the Abu Ghraib photos and reports of the Arab world's phlegmatic reaction to the Berg video that leads to his churn's climax, which is that we are plainly, unambiguously better than the Arab world—whereupon John Ziegler invites listeners to respond if they are so moved, repeats the special mnemonic KFI call-in number, and breaks for the :30 news and ads, on time to the second, as 'Mondo takes ISDN feed from Airwatch and the program's associate producer and call screener, Vince Nicholas—twenty-six and hiply bald—pushes back from his console and raises both arms in congratulation, through the glass.

ISDN, in which the D stands for "Digital," is basically a phone line of very high quality and expense. ISDN is the main way that stations take feed for syndicated programs from companies like Infinity Broadcasting, Premiere Radio Networks, etc. KFI has its own News department and traffic reporters, but on nights and weekends it subscribes to an independent service called Airwatch that provides off-hour news and traffic for stations in the LA area. When, at :17 and :46 every hour, Mr. Z. intros a report from "Alan LaGreen in the KFI Traffic Center," it's really Alan LaGreen of Airwatch, who's doing ISDN traffic reports for different stations at different times all hour and has to be very careful to give the right call letters for the Traffic Center he's supposedly reporting from.

It goes without saying that there are all different kinds of stimulation. Depending on one's politics, sensitivities, and tastes in argumentation, it is not hard to think of objections to John Ziegler's climactic claim, or at least of some urgent requests for clarification. Like: Exactly what and whom does "the Arab world" refer to? And why are a few editorials and man-on-the-street interviews sufficient to represent the attitude and character of a whole diverse region? And why is al-Jazeera's showing of the Berg video so awful if Mr. Z. has just castigated the U.S. networks for *not* showing it? Plus, of course, what is "better" supposed to mean here? More moral? More diffident about our immorality? Is it not, in our own history, pretty easy to name some Berg-level atrocities committed by U.S. nationals, or agencies, or even governments, and approved by much of our populace? Or perhaps this: Leaving aside whether John Ziegler's assertions are true or coherent, is it even remotely helpful or productive to make huge, sweeping claims about some other region's/culture's inferiority to us? What possible effect can such remarks have except to incite hatred? Aren't they sort of irresponsible?

It is true that no one on either side of the studio's thick window expresses or even alludes to any of these objections. But this is not because Mr. Z.'s support staff is stupid, or hateful, or even necessarily on board with sweeping jingoistic claims. It is because they understand the particular codes and imperatives of large-market talk radio. The fact of the matter is that it is not John Ziegler's job to be responsible, or nuanced, or to think about whether his on-air comments are productive or dangerous, or cogent, or even defensible. That is not to say that the host would not defend his "we're better"—strenuously—or that he does not believe it's true. It is to say that he has exactly one on-air job, and that is to be stimulating. An obvious point, but it's one that's often overlooked by people who complain about propaganda, misinformation, and irresponsibility in commercial talk radio. Whatever else they are, the above-type objections to "We're better than the Arab world" are calls to accountability. They are the sort of criticisms one might make of, say, a journalist, someone whose job description includes being responsible about what he says in public. And KFI's John Ziegler is not a journalist—he is an entertainer. Or maybe it's better to say that he is part of a peculiar, modern, and very popular type of news industry, one that manages to enjoy the authority and influence of journalism without the stodgy constraints of fairness, objectivity, and responsibility that make trying to tell the truth such a drag for everyone involved. It is a frightening industry, though not for any of the simple reasons most critics give.

KFI management's explanation of "stimulating" is apposite, if a bit slippery. Following is an excerpted transcript of a May 25 Q & A with Ms. Robin Bertolucci, the station's intelligent, highly successful, and sort of hypnotically intimidating Program Director. (The haphazard start is because the interviewing skills behind the Q parts are marginal; the excerpt gets more interesting as it goes along.)

Q: Is there some compact way to describe KFI's programming philosophy?

A: "What we call ourselves is 'More Stimulating Talk Radio.'"

Q: Pretty much got that part already.

A: "That is the slogan that we try to express every minute on the air. Of being stimulating. Being informative, being entertaining, being energetic, being dynamic … The way we do it is a marriage of information and stimulating entertainment."

Q: What exactly is it that makes information entertaining?

A: "It's attitudinal, it's emotional."

Q: Can you explain this attitudinal component?

A: "I think 'stimulating' really sums it up. It's what we really try to do."

Q: [strangled frustration noises]

A: "Look, our station logo is in orange and black, and white—it's a stark, aggressive look. I think that typifies it. The attitude. A little in-your-face. We're not … stodgy."

See, e.g., Mr. John Kobylt, of KFI's top-rated afternoon *John & Ken Show*, in a recent *LA Times* profile: "The truth is, we do everything for ratings. Yes, that's our job. I can show you the contract … This is not *Meet the Press*. It's not *The Jim Lehrer News Hour*."

Or you could call it atavistic, a throwback. The truth is that what we think of as objectivity in journalism has been a standard since only the 1900s, and mainly in the United States. Have a look at some European dailies sometime.



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KFI has large billboards at traffic nodes all over metro Los Angeles with the same general look and feel, although the billboards often carry both the Sweeper and extra tag phrases—"Raving Infomaniacs," "The Death of Ignorance," "The Straight Poop," and (against a military-camouflage background) "Intelligence Briefings."

The Airmix room's analogue to the cards is a bumper sticker next to the producer's station:

WHO WOULD THE FRENCH VOTE FOR?
*—AMERICANS FOR BUSH*

(He never leaves his chair during breaks, for example, not even to use the restroom.)

EDITORIAL ASIDE It's hard to understand Fox News tags like "Fair and Balanced," "No-Spin Zone," and "We Report, You Decide" as anything but dark jokes, ones that delight the channel's conservative audience precisely because their claims to objectivity so totally enrage liberals, whose own literal interpretation of the tag lines makes the left seem dim, humorless, and stodgy.

EDITORIAL ASIDE Of course, this is assuming one believes that information and spin are different things—and one of the dangers of partisan news's metastasis is the way it enables the conviction that the two aren't really distinct at all. Such a conviction, if it becomes endemic, alters democratic discourse from a "battle of ideas" to a battle of sales pitches for ideas (assuming, again, that one chooses to distinguish ideas from pitches, or actual guilt/innocence from lawyers' arguments, or binding commitments from the mere words "I promise," and so on and so forth).

Distributed over two walls of KFI's broadcast studio, behind the monitors and clocks, are a dozen promotional KFI posters, all in the station's eye-catching Halloween colors against the Sweeper's bright white. On each poster, the word "stimulating" is both italicized and underscored. Except for the door and soundproof window, the entire studio is lined in acoustic tile with strange Pollockian patterns of tiny holes. Much of the tile is grayed and decaying, and the carpet's no color at all; KFI has been in this facility for nearly thirty years and will soon be moving out. Both the studio and Airmix are kept chilly because of all the electronics. The overhead lights are old inset fluorescents, the kind with the slight flutter to them; nothing casts any sort of shadow. On one of the studio walls is also pinned the special set of playing cards distributed for the invasion of Iraq, these with hand-drawn Xs over the faces of those Baathists captured or killed so far. The great L-shaped table that Mr. Z. sits at nearly fills the little room; it's got so many coats of brown paint on it that the tabletop looks slightly humped. At the L's base is another Shure microphone, used by Ken Chiampou of 3:00–7:00's *John & Ken*, its hinged stand now partly folded up so that the mike hangs like a wilted flower. The oddest thing about the studio is a strong scent of decaying bananas, as if many peels or even whole bananas were rotting in the room's wastebaskets, none of which look to have been emptied anytime recently. Mr. Ziegler, who has his ascetic side, drinks only bottled water in the studio, and certainly never snacks, so there is no way he is the source of the banana smell.

It is worth considering the strange media landscape in which political talk radio is a salient. Never before have there been so many different national news sources—different now in terms of both medium and ideology. Major newspapers from anywhere are available online; there are the broadcast networks plus public TV, cable's CNN, Fox News, CNBC, et al., print and Web magazines, Internet bulletin boards, *The Daily Show*, e-mail newsletters, blogs. All this is well known; it's part of the Media Environment we live in. But there are prices and ironies here. One is that the increasing control of U.S. mass media by a mere handful of corporations has—rather counterintuitively—created a situation of extreme fragmentation, a kaleidoscope of information options. Another is that the ever increasing number of ideological news outlets creates precisely the kind of relativism that cultural conservatives decry, a kind of epistemic free-for-all in which "the truth" is wholly a matter of perspective and agenda. In some respects all this variety is probably good, productive of difference and dialogue and so on. But it can also be confusing and stressful for the average citizen. Short of signing on to a particular mass ideology and patronizing only those partisan news sources that ratify what you want to believe, it is increasingly hard to determine which sources to pay attention to and how exactly to distinguish real information from spin.

This fragmentation and confusion have helped give rise to what's variously called the "meta-media" or "explaining industry." Under most classifications, this category includes media critics for news dailies, certain high-end magazines, panel shows like CNN's *Reliable Sources*, media-watch blogs like instapundit.com and talkingpointsmemo.com, and a large percentage of political talk radio. It is no accident that one of the signature lines Mr. Ziegler likes to deliver over his opening bumper music at :06 is "... the show where we take a look at the news of the day, we provide you the facts, and then we give you the truth." For this is how much of contemporary political talk radio understands its function: to explore the day's

KFI AM 640



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news in a depth and detail that other media do not, and to interpret, analyze, and explain that news.

Which all sounds great, except of course "explaining" the news really means editorializing, infusing the actual events of the day with the host's own opinions. And here is where the real controversy starts, because these opinions are, as just one person's opinions, exempt from strict journalistic standards of truthfulness, probity, etc., and yet they are often delivered by the talk-radio host not as opinions but as revealed truths, truths intentionally ignored or suppressed by a "mainstream press" that's "biased" in favor of liberal interests. This is, at any rate, the rhetorical template for Rush Limbaugh's program, on which most syndicated and large-market political talk radio is modeled, from ABC's Sean Hannity and Talk Radio Network's Laura Ingraham to G. G. Liddy, Rusty Humphries, Michael Medved, Mike Gallagher, Neal Boortz, Dennis Prager, and, in many respects, Mr. John Ziegler.

KFI AM-640 carries Rush Limbaugh every weekday, 9:00 A.M. to noon, via live ISDN feed from Premiere Radio Networks, which is one of the dozen syndication networks that own talk-radio shows so popular that it's worth it for local stations to air them even though it costs the stations a portion of their spot load. The same goes for Dr. Laura Schlessinger, who's based in southern California and used to broadcast her syndicated show from KFI until the mid-nineties, when Premiere built its own LA facility and was able to offer Schlessinger more-sumptuous digs. Dr. Laura airs M-F from noon to 3:00 on KFI, though her shows are canned and there's no live feed. Besides 7:00–10:00 P.M.'s Phil Hendrie (another KFI host whose show went into national syndication, and who now has his own private dressing room and studio over at Premiere), the only other weekday syndication KFI uses is *Coast to Coast With George Noory*, which covers and analyzes news of the paranormal throughout the wee hours.

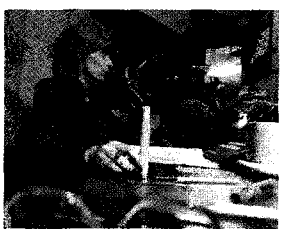
PURELY INFORMATIVE It's true that there are, in some large markets and even syndication, a few political talk-radio hosts who identify as moderate or liberal. The best known of these are probably Ed Schultz, Thom Hartmann, and Doug Stephan. But only a few—and only Stephan has anything close to a national audience. And the tribulations of Franken et al.'s Air America venture are well known. The point is that it is neither inaccurate nor unfair to say that today's political talk radio is, in general, overwhelmingly conservative.

(whose show is really only semi-political)

Quick sample intros: Mike Gallagher, a regular Fox News contributor whose program is syndicated by Salem Radio Network, has an upcoming book called *Surrounded by Idiots: Fighting Liberal Lunacy in America.* Neal Boortz, who's carried by Cox Radio Syndication and JRN, bills himself as "High Priest of the Church of the Painful Truth," and his recent ads in trade publications feature the quotation "How can we take airport security seriously until ethnic profiling is not only permitted, but *encouraged*?"

Mr. Z. identifies himself as a Libertarian, though he's not a registered member of the Libertarian Party, because he feels they "can't get their act together," which he does not seem to intend as a witticism.

"Spot load" is the industry term for the number of minutes per hour given over to commercials. The point of the main-text sentence is that a certain percentage of the spots that run on KFI from 9:00 to noon are Rush/PRN commercials, and they are the ones who get paid by the advertisers. The exact percentages and distributions of local vs. syndicator's commercials are determined by what's called the "Clock," which is represented by a pie-shaped distribution chart that Ms. Bertolucci has on file but will show only a very quick glimpse of, since the spot-load apportionments for syndicated shows in major markets involve complex negotiations between the station and the syndicator, and KFI regards its syndicated Clocks as proprietary info—it doesn't want other stations to know what deals have been cut with PRN.



STEVE STARR/CORBIS

In White Star Productions' *History of Talk Radio* video, available at better libraries everywhere, there is footage of Dr. Laura doing her show right here at KFI, although she's at a mike in what's now the Airmix room—which, according to 'Mondo, used to be the studio, with what's now the studio serving as Airmix. (Why they switched rooms is unclear, but transferring all the gear must have been a serious hassle.) In the video, the little gray digital clock propped up counting seconds on Dr. Laura's desk is the same one that now counts seconds on the wall to Mr. Ziegler's upper left in the studio—i.e., it's the very same clock—which not only is strangely thrilling but also further testifies to KFI's thriftiness about capital expenses.

Whatever the social effects of talk radio or the partisan agendas of certain hosts, it is a fallacy that political talk radio is motivated by ideology. It is not. Political talk radio is a business, and it is motivated by revenue. The conservatism that dominates today's AM airwaves does so because it generates high Arbitron ratings, high ad rates, and maximum profits.

Radio has become a more lucrative business than most people know. Throughout most of the past decade, the industry's revenues have increased by more than 10 percent a year. The average cash-flow margin for major radio companies is 40 percent, compared with more like 15 percent for large TV networks; and the mean price paid for a radio station has gone from eight to more than thirteen times cash flow. Some of this extreme profitability, and thus the structure of the industry, is due to the 1996 Telecommunications Act, which allows radio companies to acquire up to eight stations in a given market and to control as much as 35 percent of a market's total ad revenues. The emergence of huge, dominant radio conglomerates like Clear Channel and Infinity is a direct consequence of the '96 Act (which the FCC, aided by the very conservative D.C. Court of



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Appeals, has lately tried to make even more permissive). And these radio conglomerates enjoy not just substantial economies of scale but almost unprecedented degrees of business integration.

Example: Clear Channel Communications Inc. now owns KFI AM-640, plus two other AM stations and five FMs in the Los Angeles market. It also owns Premiere Radio Networks. It also owns the Airwatch subscription news/traffic service. And it designs and manufactures Prophet, KFI's operating system, which is state-of-the-art and much too expensive for most independent stations. All told, Clear Channel currently owns some 1,200 radio stations nationwide, one of which happens to be Louisville, Kentucky's WHAS, the AM talk station from which John Ziegler was fired, amid spectacular gossip and controversy, in August of 2003. Which means that Mr. Ziegler now works in Los Angeles for the same company that just fired him in Louisville, such that his firing now appears—in retrospect, and considering the relative sizes of the Louisville and LA markets—to have been a promotion. All of which turns out to be a strange and revealing story about what a talk-radio host's life is like.

Clear Channel bought KFI—or rather the radio company that owned KFI—sometime around 2000. It's all a little fuzzy, because it appears that Clear Channel actually bought, or absorbed, the radio company that had just bought KFI from another radio company, or something like that.

It turns out that one of the reasons its old Koreatown studios are such a latrine is that KFI's getting ready to move very soon to a gleaming new complex in Burbank that will house five of Clear Channel's stations and allow them to share a lot of cutting-edge technical equipment and software. Some of the reasons for the consolidation involve AM radio's complex, incremental move from analog to digital broadcast, a move that's a lot more economical if stations can be made to share equipment. The Burbank hub facility will also feature a new and improved mega-Prophet OS that all five stations can use and share files on, which for KFI means convenient real-time access to all sorts of new preloaded bumper music and sound effects and bites.

As the board op, 'Mondo Hernandez is also responsible for downloading and cueing up the sections of popular songs that intro the *John Ziegler Show* and background Mr. Z.'s voice when a new segment starts. Bumper music is, of course, a talk-radio convention: Rush Limbaugh has a franchise on the Pretenders, and Sean Hannity always uses that horrific Martina McBride "Let freedom ring / Let the guilty pay" song. Mr. Z. favors a whole rotating set of classic rock hooks, but his current favorites are Van Halen's "Right Now" and a certain jaunty part of the theme to *Pirates of the Caribbean*, because, according to 'Mondo, "they get John pumped."

N.B. Mr. Z. usually refers to himself as either "Zig" or "the Zigmeister," and has made a determined effort to get everybody at KFI to call him Zig, with only limited success so far.

(2)

For obvious reasons, critics of political talk radio concern themselves mainly with the programs' content. Talk station management, on the other hand, tends to think of content as a subset of personality, of how stimulating a given host is. As for the hosts—ask Mr. Ziegler off-air what makes him good at his job, and he'll shrug glumly and say, "I'm not really all that talented. I've got passion, and I work really hard." Taken so for granted that nobody in the business seems aware of it is something that an outsider, sitting in Airmix and watching John Ziegler at the microphone, will notice right away. Hosting talk radio is an exotic, high-pressure gig that not many people are fit for, and being truly good at it requires skills so specialized that many of them don't have names.

To appreciate these skills and some of the difficulties involved, you might wish to do an experiment. Try sitting alone in a room with a clock, turning on a tape recorder, and starting to speak into it. Speak about anything you want—with the proviso that your topic, and your opinions on it, must be of interest to some group of strangers who you imagine will be listening to the tape. Naturally, in order to be even minimally interesting, your remarks should be intelligible and their reasoning sequential—a listener will have to be able to follow the logic of what you're saying—which means that you will have to know enough about your topic to organize your statements in a coherent way. (But you cannot do much of this organizing beforehand; it has to occur at the same time you're speaking.) Plus, ideally, what you're saying should be not just comprehensible and interesting but compelling, stimulating, which means that your remarks have to provoke and sustain some kind of emotional reaction in the listeners, which in turn will require you to construct some kind of identifiable persona for yourself—your comments will need to strike the listener as coming from an actual human

(Which means that the negotiations between KFI and PRN over the terms of syndication for Rush, Dr. Laura, et al. are actually negotiations between two parts of the same company, which either helps explain or renders even more mysterious KFI's reticence about detailing the Clocks for its PRN shows.)

"Passion" is a big word in the industry, and John Ziegler uses the word in connection with himself a lot. It appears to mean roughly the same as what Ms. Bertolucci calls "edginess" or "attitude."

Part of the answer to why conservative talk radio works so well might be that extreme conservatism provides a neat, clear, univocal template with which to organize one's opinions and responses to the world. The current term of approbation for this kind of template is "moral clarity."

It is, of course, much less difficult to arouse genuine anger, indignation, and outrage in people than it is real joy, satisfaction, fellow feeling, etc. The latter are fragile and complex, and what excites them varies a great deal from person to person, whereas anger et al. are more primal, universal, and easy to stimulate (as implied by expressions like "He really pushes my buttons").



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being, someone with a real personality and real feelings about whatever it is you're discussing. And it gets even trickier: You're trying to communicate in real time with someone you cannot see or hear responses from; and though you're communicating in speech, your remarks cannot have any of the fragmentary, repetitive, garbled qualities of real interhuman speech, or speech's ticcy unconscious "umm"s or "you know"s, or false starts or stutters or long pauses while you try to think of how to phrase what you want to say next. You're also, of course, denied the physical inflections that are so much a part of spoken English—the facial expressions, changes in posture, and symphony of little gestures that accompany and buttress real talking. Everything unspoken about you, your topic, and how you feel about it has to be conveyed through pitch, volume, tone, and pacing. The pacing is especially important: it can't be too slow, since that's low-energy and dull, but it can't be too rushed or it will sound like babbling. And so you have somehow to keep all these different imperatives and structures in mind at the same time, while also filling exactly, say, eleven minutes, with no dead air and no going over, such that at 10:46 you have wound things up neatly and are in a position to say, "KFI is the station with the most frequent traffic reports. Alan LaGreen is in the KFI Traffic Center" (which, to be honest, Mr. Z. sometimes leaves himself only three or even two seconds for and has to say extremely fast, which he can always do without a flub). So then, ready: go.

It's no joke. See for example the *John Ziegler Show*'s producer, Emiliano Limon, who broke in at KFI as a weekend overnight host before moving across the glass:

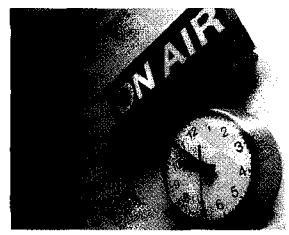
"What's amazing is that when you get new people who think that they can do a talk-radio program, you watch them for the first time. By three minutes into it, they have that look on their face like, 'Oh my God, I've got ten minutes left. What am I going to say?' And that's what happened to me a lot. So you end up talking about yourself [which, for complex philosophical reasons, the producer disapproves of], or you end up yammering." Emiliano is a large, very calm and competent man in his mid-thirties who either wears the same black *LA Times* T-shirt every day or owns a whole closetful of them. He was pulled off other duties to help launch KFI's experimental Live and Local evening show, an assignment that obviously involves working closely with Mr. Z., which Emiliano seems to accept as his karmic punishment for being so unflappable and easy to get along with. He laughs more than everyone else at KFI put together.

"I remember one time, I just broke after five minutes, I was just done, and they were going, 'Hey, what are you doing, you have another ten minutes!' And I was like, 'I don't know what else to say!' And that's what happens. For those people who think 'Oh, I could do talk radio,' well, there's more to it. A lot of people can't take it once they get that taste of, you know, 'Geez, I gotta fill all this time *and* sound interesting?'

"Then, as you keep on doing it over the days, there's something that becomes absolutely clear to you. You're not really acting on the radio. It's *you*. If no one really responds and the ratings aren't good, it means they don't like *you*." Which is worth keeping very much in mind.

This, too: Consider the special intimacy of talk radio. It's usually listened to solo—radio is the most solitary of broadcast media. And half-an-ear background-listening is much more common with music formats than with talk. This is a human being speaking to you, with a pro-caliber voice, eloquently and with passion, in what feels like a one-to-one; it doesn't take long before you start to feel you know him. Which is why it's often such a shock when you see a real host, his face—you discover you've had a picture of this person in your head without knowing it, and it's always wrong. This dissonant shock is one reason why Rush and Dr. Laura, even with their huge built-in audiences, did not fare well on TV.

(as the industry is at pains to remind advertisers)




The exact-timing thing is actually a little less urgent for a host who's got the resources of Clear Channel behind him. This is because in KFI's Airmix room, nestled third from the bottom in one of the two eight-foot stacks of processing gear to the left of 'Mondo's mixing board, is an Akai DD1000 Magneto Optical Disk Recorder, known less formally as a "Cashbox." What this is is a sound compressor, which exploits the fact that even a live studio program is—because of the FCC-mandated seven-second delay—taped. Here is how 'Mondo, in exchange for certain vending-machine comestibles, explains the Cashbox: "All the shows are supposed to start at six past. But if they put more spots in the log, or say, like, if traffic goes long, now we're all of a sudden starting at seven past or something. The Cashbox can take a twenty-minute segment and turn it into a nineteen." It does this by using computerized sound-processing to eliminate pauses and periodically accelerate Mr. Z.'s delivery just a bit. The trick is that the Cashbox can compress sound so artfully that you don't hear the speed-up, at least not in a nineteen-for-twenty exchange ("You get down to eighteen it's risky, or down around seventeen you can definitely hear it"). So if things are running a little over, 'Mondo has to use the Cashbox—very deftly, via controls that look really complicated—in order to make sure that the Clock's adhered to and Airwatch breaks, promos, and ad spots all run as specified. A gathering suspicion as to why the Akai DD1000 is called the Cashbox occasions a Q: Does the station ever press 'Mondo or other board ops to use the Cashbox and compress shows in order to make room for additional ads? A: "Not really. What they'll do is just put an extra spot or two in the log, and then I've just got to do the best I can."

The only elocutionary problem Mr. Z. ever exhibits is a habit of confusing the words "censure" and "censor."

PHOTONICA



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An abiding question: Who exactly listens to political talk radio? Arbitron Inc. and some of its satellites can help measure how many are listening for how long and when, and they provide some rough age data and demographic specs. A lot of the rest is guesswork, and Program Directors don't like to talk about it.

From outside, though, one of the best clues to how a radio station understands its audience is spots. Which commercials it runs, and when, indicate how the station is pitching its listeners' tastes and receptivities to sponsors. In how often particular spots are repeated lie clues to the length of time the station thinks people are listening, how attentive it thinks they are, etc. Specific example: Just from its spot load, we can deduce that KFI trusts its audience to sit still for an extraordinary amount of advertising. An average hour of the *John Ziegler Show* consists of four program segments: :06–:17, :23–:30, :37–:46, and :53–:00, or thirty-four minutes of Mr. Z. actually talking. Since KFI's newscasts are never more than ninety seconds, and since quarterly traffic reports are always bracketed by "live-read" spots for Traffic Center sponsors, that makes each hour at least 40 percent ads; the percentage is higher if you count Sweepers for the station and promos for other KFI shows. And this is the load just on a local program, one for which the Clock doesn't have to be split with a syndicator.

For instance, one has only to listen to *Coast to Coast With George Noory*'s ads for gold as a hedge against hyperinflation, special emergency radios you can hand-crank in case of extended power failure, miracle weight-loss formulas, online dating services, etc., to understand that KFI and the syndicator regard this show's audience as basically frightened, credulous, and desperate.

(ad-wise, a lucrative triad indeed)

A live read is when a host or newsperson reads the ad copy himself on-air. They're sort of a radio tradition, but the degree to which KFI weaves live reads into its programming is a great leap forward for broadcast marketing. Live-read spots are more expensive for advertisers, especially the longer, more detailed ones read by the programs' hosts, since these ads (a) can sound at first like an actual talk segment and (b) draw on the personal appeal and credibility of the host. And the spots themselves are often clearly set up to exploit these features—see for instance John Kobylt's live read for LA's Cunning Dental Group during afternoons' *John & Ken*: "Have you noticed how bad the teeth are of all the contestants in these reality shows? I saw some of this the other day. Discolored, chipped, misshaped, misaligned, rotted-out teeth, missing teeth, not to mention the bleeding, oozing, pus-y gums. You go to Cunning Dental Group, they will take all your gross teeth and in one or two visits fix them and give you a bright shiny smile."

(It's unclear how one spells the adjectival form of "pus," though it sounds okay on-air.)

Even more expensive than live reads are what's called "endorsements," which are when a host describes, in ecstatically favorable terms, his own personal experience with a product or service. Examples here include Phil Hendrie's weight loss on Cortislim, Kobylt's "better than 20-20" laser-surgery outcome with Saddleback Eye Center, and Mr. Bill Handel's frustrations with dial-up ISPs before discovering DSL Extreme. These ads, which are KFI's most powerful device for exploiting the intimacy and trust of the listener-host relationship, also result in special "endorsement fees" paid directly to the host.

Handel, whose KFI show is an LA institution in morning drive, describes his program as "in-your-face, informational, with a lot of racial humor."

It's not that KFI's unaware of the dangers here. Station management reads its mail, and as Emiliano Limon puts it, "If there's one complaint listeners always have, it's the spot load." But the only important issue is whether all the complaints translate into actual listener behavior. KFI's spot load is an instance of the kind of multivariable maximization problem that M.B.A. programs thrive on. It is obviously in the station's financial interest to carry just as high a volume of ads as it can without hurting ratings—the moment listeners begin turning away from KFI because of too many commercials, the Arbitron numbers go down, the rates charged for ads have to be reduced, and profitability suffers. But anything more specific is, again, guesswork. When asked about management's thinking here, or whether there's any particular formula KFI uses to figure out how high a spot load the market will bear, Ms. Bertolucci will only smile and shrug as if pleasantly stumped: "We have more commercials than we've ever had, and our ratings are the best they've ever been."

It's a little more complicated than that, really, because excessive spots can also affect ratings in less direct ways—mainly by lowering the quality of the programming. Industry analyst Michael Harrison, of *Talkers* magazine, complains that "The commercial breaks are so long today that it is hard for hosts to build upon where they left off. The whole audience could have changed. There is the tendency to go back to the beginning and re-set up the premise. It makes it very difficult to do what long-form programming is supposed to do."

SEMI-EDITORIAL Even in formal, on-record, and very PR-savvy interviews, the language of KFI management is filled with little unconscious bits of jargon—"inventory" for the total number of ad minutes available, "product" for a given program, or (a favorite) "to monetize," which means to extract ad revenue from a given show—that let one know exactly where KFI's priorities lie. Granted, the station is a business, and broadcasting is not charity work. But given how intimate and relationship-driven talk radio is, it's disheartening when management's only term for KFI's listeners, again and again, is "market."

How often a particular spot can run over and over before listeners just can't stand it anymore is something else no one will talk about, but the evidence suggests that KFI sees its audience as either very patient and tolerant or almost catatonically inattentive. Canned ads for local



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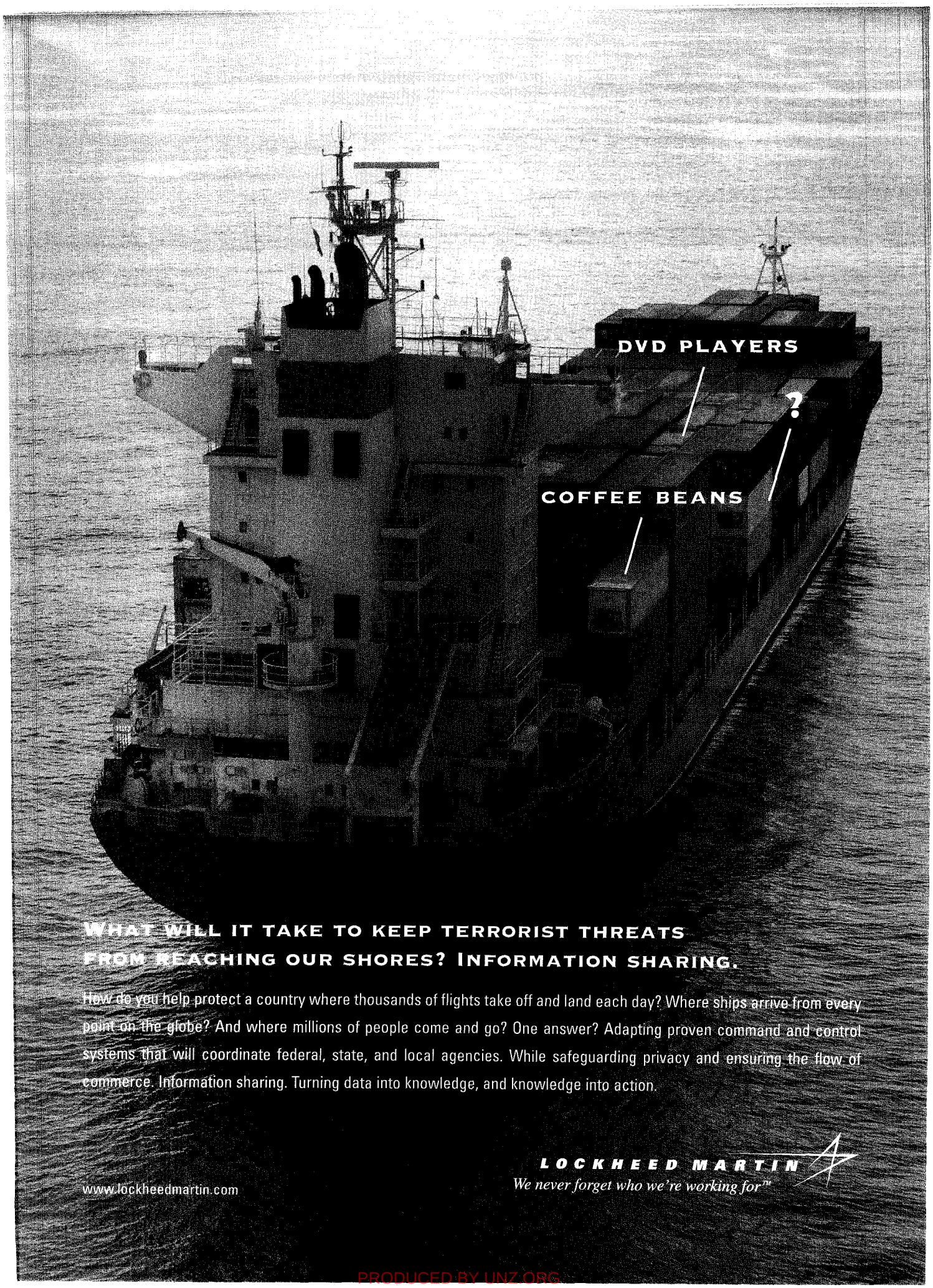


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CONSUMER ADVISORY As it happens, these two are products of Berkeley Premium Nutraceuticals, an Ohio company with annual sales of more than $100 million, as well as over 3,000 complaints to the BBB and the Attorney General's Office in its home state alone. Here's why. The radio ads say you can get a thirty-day free trial of Enzyte by calling a certain toll-free number. If you call, it turns out there's a $4.90 S&H charge for the free month's supply, which the lady on the phone wants you to put on your credit card. If you acquiesce, the company then starts shipping you more Enzyte every month and auto-billing your card for at least $35 each time, because it turns out that by taking the thirty-day trial you've somehow signed up for Berkeley's automatic-purchase program—which the operator neglected to mention. And calling Berkeley Nutraceuticals to get the automatic shipments and billings stopped doesn't much help; often they'll stop only if some kind of consumer agency sends a letter. It's the same with Altovis and its own "free trial." In short, the whole thing is one of those irksome, hassle-laden marketing schemes, and KFI runs dozens of spots per day for Berkeley products. The degree to which the station is legally responsible for an advertiser's business practices is, by FTC and FCC rules, nil. But it's hard not to see KFI's relationship with Berkeley as another indication of the station's true regard for its listeners.

FYI: Enzyte, which bills itself as a natural libido and virility enhancer (it also has all those "Smiling Bob & Grateful Wife" commercials on cable TV), contains tribulis terrestris, panax ginseng, ginko biloba, and a half dozen other innocuous herbal ingredients. The product costs Berkeley, in one pharmacologist's words, "nothing to make." But it's de facto legal to charge hundreds of dollars a year for it, and to advertise it as an OTC Viagra. The FDA doesn't regulate herbal meds unless people are actually falling over from taking them, and the Federal Trade Commission doesn't have anything like the staff to keep up with the advertising claims, so it's all basically an unregulated market.

(Calls to KFI's Sales department re consumers' amply documented problems with Enzyte and Altovis were, as the journalists say, not returned.)

sponsors like Robbins Bros. Jewelers, Sit 'n Sleep Mattress, and the Power Auto Group play every couple hours, 24/7, until one knows every hitch and nuance. National saturation campaigns for products like Cortislim vary things somewhat by using both endorsements and canned spots. Pitches for caveat emptor–type nostrums like Avacor (for hair loss), Enzyte ("For natural male enhancement!"), and Altovis ("Helps fight daily fatigue!") often repeat once an hour through the night. As of spring '04, though, the most frequent and concussive ads on KFI are for mortgage and home-refi companies—Green Light Financial, HMS Capital, Home Field Financial, Benchmark Lending. Over and over. Pacific Home Financial, U.S. Mortgage Capital, Crestline Funding, Advantix Lending. Reverse mortgages, negative amortization, adjustable rates, APR, FICO ... where did all these firms come from? What were these guys doing five years ago? Why is KFI's audience seen as so especially ripe and ready for refi? Betterloans.com, lendingtree.com, Union Bank of California, on and on and on.

Emiliano Limon's "It's *you*" seems true to an extent. But there is also the issue of persona, meaning the on-air personality that a host adopts in order to heighten the sense of a real person behind the mike. It is, after all, unlikely that Rush Limbaugh always feels as jaunty and confident as he seems on the air, or that Howard Stern really is deeply fascinated by porn starlets every waking minute of the day. But a host's persona is not the same as outright acting. For the most part, it's probably more like the way we are all slightly different with some people than we are with others.

(somewhat paradoxically)

In some cases, though, the personas are more contrived and extreme. In the slot preceding Mr. Z.'s on KFI, for instance, is the *Phil Hendrie Show*, which is actually a cruel and complicated kind of meta–talk radio. What happens every night on this program is that Phil Hendrie brings on some wildly offensive guest—a man who's leaving his wife because she's had a mastectomy, a Little League coach who advocates corporal punishment of players, a retired colonel who claims that females' only proper place in the military is as domestics and concubines for the officers—and first-time or casual listeners will call in and argue with the guests and (not surprisingly) get very angry and upset. Except the whole thing's a put-on. The guests are fake, their different voices done by Hendrie with the aid of mike processing and a first-rate board op, and the show's real entertainment is the callers, who don't know it's all a gag—Hendrie's real audience, which is in on the joke, enjoys hearing these callers get more and more outraged and sputtery as the "guests" yank their chain. It's all a bit like the old *Candid Camera* if the joke perpetrated over and over on that show were convincing somebody that a loved one had just died. So obviously Hendrie—whose show now draws an estimated one million listeners a week—lies on the outer frontier of radio persona.

(who really is a gifted mimic)

Apparently, one reason why Hendrie's show was perfect for national syndication was that the wider dissemination gave Hendrie a much larger pool of uninitiated listeners to call in and entertain the initiated listeners.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES



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# There's a reason we'll never run out of trees. We put them back after we use them.

Most of the natural resources people rely on aren't being replaced. In fact, they can't be replaced. Fortunately, that's not the case with trees. This year, like every year, Weyerhaeuser planted over 100 million seedlings to replenish forests that provide products people need every day, like wood to build homes, packaging to ship food and paper for books. That's especially meaningful when you realize we harvest only a small portion of the timberlands in our care—about 1 to 3 percent a year, depending on growing cycles.

We understand that managing a resource as precious as trees isn't just a business. It's a special responsibility. So we never forget a simple lesson most of us learned as children: If you always put things back, they'll always be there when you need them.

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A big part of John Ziegler's on-air persona, on the other hand, is that he doesn't have one. This may be just a function of all the time he's spent in the abattoir of small-market radio, but in Los Angeles it plays as a canny and sophisticated meta-radio move. Part of his January introduction to himself and his program is "The key to the *John Ziegler Show* is that I am almost completely real. Nearly every show begins with the credo 'This is the show where the host says what he believes and believes what he says.' I do not make up my opinions or exaggerate my stories simply to stir the best debate on that particular broadcast."

Though Mr. Z. won't ever quite say so directly, his explicit I-have-no-persona persona helps to establish a contrast with weekday afternoons' John Kobylt, whose on-air voice is similar to Ziegler's in pitch and timbre. Kobylt and his sidekick Ken Chiampou have a hugely popular show based around finding stories and causes that will make white, middle-class Californians feel angry and disgusted, and then hammering away at these stories/causes day after day. Their personas are what the *LA Times* calls "brash" and Chiampou himself calls "rabid dogs," which latter KFI has developed into the promo line "The Junkyard Dogs of Talk Radio." What John & Ken really are is professional oiks. Their show is credited with helping jumpstart the '03 campaign to recall Governor Gray Davis, although they were equally disgusted by most of the candidates who wanted to replace him (q.v. Kobylt: "If there's anything I don't like more than politicians, it's those wormy little nerds who act as campaign handlers and staff ... We just happened to on our own decide that Davis was a rotting stool that ought to be flushed"). In '02, they organized a parade of SUVs in Sacramento to protest stricter vehicle-emissions laws; this year they spend at least an hour a day attacking various government officials and their spokesholes for failing to enforce immigration laws and trying to bullshit the citizens about it; and so on. But the *John & Ken Show*'s real specialty is gruesome, high-profile California trials, which they often cover on-site, Kobylt eschewing all PC pussyfooting and legal niceties to speak his mind about defendants like 2002's David Westerfield and the current Scott Peterson, both "scumbags that are guilty as sin." The point is that John Kobylt broadcasts in an almost perpetual state of affronted

National talk-radio hosts like Limbaugh, Prager, Hendrie, Gallagher, et al. tend to have rich baritone radio voices that rarely peak, whereas today's KFI has opted for a local-host sound that's more like a slightly adenoidal second tenor. The voices of Kobylt, Bill Handel, Ken Chiampou, weekend host Wayne Resnick, and John Ziegler all share not only this tenor pitch but also a certain quality that is hard to describe except as sounding stressed, aggrieved, Type A: the Little Guy Who's Had It Up To Here. Kobylt's voice in particular has a consistently snarling, dyspeptic, fed-up quality—a perfect aural analogue to the way drivers' faces look in jammed traffic—whereas Mr. Ziegler's tends to rise and fall more, often hitting extreme upper registers of outraged disbelief. Off-air, Mr. Z.'s speaking voice is nearly an octave lower than it sounds on his program, which is a bit mysterious, since 'Mondo denies doing anything special to the on-air voice except setting the default volume on the board's channel 7 a bit low because "John sort of likes to yell a lot." And Mr. Ziegler bristles at the suggestion that he, Kobylt, or Handel has anything like a high voice on the air: "It's just that we're passionate. Rush doesn't get all that passionate. You try being passionate and having a low voice."

(as in if you listen to an upset person say "I can't be*lieve* it!")

CONTAINS EDITORIAL ELEMENTS It should be conceded that there is at least one real and refreshing journalistic advantage that bloggers, fringe-cable newsmen, and most talk-radio hosts have over the mainstream media: they are neither the friends nor the peers of the public officials they cover. Why this is an advantage involves an issue that tends to get obscured by the endless fight over whether there's actually a "liberal bias" in the "elite" mainstream press. Whether one buys the bias thing or not, it is clear that leading media figures are part of a very different social and economic class than most of their audiences. See, e.g., a snippet of Eric Alterman's recent *What Liberal Media?*:

> No longer the working-class heroes of *The Front Page/His Gal Friday* lore, elite journalists in Washington and New York [and LA] are rock-solid members of the political and financial Establishment about whom they write. They dine at the same restaurants and take their vacations on the same Caribbean islands ... What's more, like the politicians, their jobs are not subject to export to China or Bangladesh.

This is why the really potent partisan label for the *NYT/Time*/network-level press is not "liberal media" but "elite media"—because the label's true. And talk radio is very deliberately not part of this elite media. With the exception of Limbaugh and maybe Hannity, these hosts are not stars, or millionaires, or sophisticates. And a large part of their on-air persona is that they are of and for their audience—the Little Guy—and against corrupt, incompetent pols and their "spokesholes," against smooth-talking lawyers and PC whiners and idiot bureaucrats, against illegal aliens clogging our highways and emergency rooms, paroled sex offenders living among us, punitive vehicle taxes, and stupid, self-righteous, agenda-laden laws against public smoking, SUV emissions, gun ownership, the right to watch the Nick Berg decapitation video over and over in slow motion, etc. In other words, the talk host's persona and appeal are deeply, totally populist, and if it's all somewhat fake—if John Kobylt can shift a little too easily from the apoplectic Little Guy of his segments to the smooth corporate shill of his live reads—then that's just life in the big city.

(Except some of your more slippery right-wing commentators use "elit*ist* media," which sounds similar but is really a far more loaded term.)

Besides legendary stunts like tossing broccoli at "vegetable-head" jurors for taking too long to find Westerfield guilty, Kobylt is maybe best known for shouting, "Come out, Scott! No one believes you! You can't hide!" at a window's silhouette as the *J & K Show* broadcast live from in front of Peterson's house, which scene got re-created in at least one recent TV movie about the Scott & Laci case.



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rage; and, as more than one KFI staffer has ventured to observe off the record, it's unlikely that any middle-aged man could really go around this upset all the time and not drop dead. It's a persona, in other words, not exactly fabricated but certainly exaggerated ... and of course it's also demagoguery of the most classic and unabashed sort.

But it makes for stimulating and profitable talk radio. As of Arbitron's winter '04 Book, KFI AM-640 has become the No.1 talk station in the country, beating out New York's WABC in both Cume and AQH for the coveted 25–54 audience. KFI also now has the second highest market share of any radio station in Los Angeles, trailing only hip-hop giant KPWR. In just one year, KFI has gone from being the eighteenth to the seventh top-billing station in the country, which is part of why it received the 2003 News/Talk Station of the Year Award from *Radio and Records* magazine. Much of this recent success is attributed to Ms. Robin Bertolucci, the Program Director brought in from Denver shortly after Clear Channel acquired KFI, whom Mr. Z. describes as "a real superstar in the business right now." From all reports, Ms. Bertolucci has done everything from redesigning the station's ID and Sweeper and sound and overall in-your-face vibe to helping established hosts fine-tune their personas and create a distinctively KFI-ish style and 'tude for their shows.

Every Wednesday afternoon, Ms. Bertolucci meets with John Ziegler to review the previous week and chat about how the show's going. The Program Director's large private office is located just off the KFI prep room (where Mr. Z.'s own office is a small computer table with a homemade THIS AREA RESERVED FOR JOHN ZIEGLER taped to it). Ms. B. is soft-spoken, polite, unpretentious, and almost completely devoid of moving parts. Here is her on-record explanation of the Program Director's role w/r/t the *John Ziegler Show*:

"It's John's show. He's flying the airplane, a big 747. What I am, I'm the little person in the control tower. I have a different perspective—"

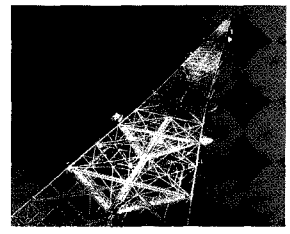
"I *have* no perspective!" Mr. Z. interrupts, with a loud laugh, from his seat before her desk.

"—which might be of value. Like, 'You may want to pull up because you're heading for a mountain.'" They both laugh. It's an outrageous bit of understatement: nine months ago John Ziegler's career was rubble, and Ms. B. is the only reason he's here, and she's every inch his boss, and he's nervous around her—which you can tell by the way he puts his long legs out and leans back in his chair with his hands in his slacks' pockets and yawns a lot and tries to look exaggeratedly relaxed.

The use of some esoteric technical slang occasions a brief Q & A on how exactly Arbitron works, while Mr. Z. joggles his sneaker impatiently. Then they go over the past week. Ms. B. gently chides the new host for not hitting the Greg Haidl trial harder, and for usually discussing the case in his show's second hour instead of the first. Her thrust: "It's a big story for us. It's got sex, it's got police, class issues, kids running amok, video, the courts, and who gets away with what. And it's in Orange County." When Mr. Ziegler (whose off-air method of showing annoyance or frustration is to sort of hang his head way over to one side) protests that both Bill Handel and John & Ken have already covered the story six ways from Sunday every day and there is no way for him to do anything fresh or stimulating with it, Ms. B. nods slowly and responds: "If we were KIIS-FM, and we had a new Christina Aguilera song, and they played it heavy on the morning show and the afternoon show, wouldn't you still play it on the evening show?" At which Mr. Z. sort of lolls his head from side to side

The *John & Ken Show* pulls higher ratings in southern California than the syndicated Rush and Dr. Laura, which is pretty much unheard of.

These are measurement categories in Arbitron Inc.'s Radio Market Reports, which reports come out four times a year and are known in the industry as "Books." In essence, Cume is the total measure of all listeners, and AQH (for "Average Quarter Hour") represents the mean number of listeners in any given fifteen-minute period.



(On the other hand, he omits to wear his golf cap in her office, and his hair shows evidence of recent combing.)

In truth, just about everyone at KFI except Ms. B. refers to Arbitron as "Arbitraryon." This is because it's 100 percent diary-based, and diary surveys are notoriously iffy, since a lot of subjects neglect to fill out their diaries in real time (especially when they're listening as they drive), tending instead to wait till the night before they're due and then trying to do them from memory. Plus it's widely held that certain ethnic minorities are chronically mis- or over-represented in metro LA's Books, evidently because Arbitron has a hard time recruiting these minorities as subjects, and when it lands a few it tends to stick with them week after week.

GEORGE B. DIEBOLD/CORBIS



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several times—"All right. I see your point. All right"—and on tonight's (i.e., May 19's) program he does lead with and spend much of the first hour on the latest Haidl developments.

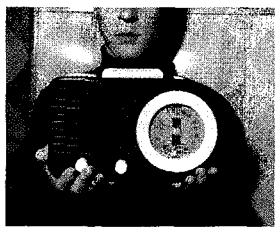
By way of post-meeting analysis, it is worth noting that a certain assumption behind Ms. B.'s Christina Aguilera analogy—namely, that a criminal trial is every bit as much an entertainment product as a Top 40 song—was not questioned or even blinked at by either participant. This is doubtless one reason for KFI's ratings éclat—the near total conflation of news and entertainment. It also explains why KFI's twice-hourly newscasts (which are always extremely short, and densely interwoven with station promos and live-read ads) concentrate so heavily on lurid, tabloidish stories. Post–Nick Berg, the station's newscasts in May and early June tend to lead with child-molestation charges against local clerics and teachers, revelations in the Peterson and Haidl trials, and developments in the Kobe Bryant and Michael Jackson cases. With respect to Ms. Bertolucci's on-record description of KFI's typical listener—"An information-seeking person that wants to know what's going on in the world and wants to be communicated to in an interesting, entertaining, stimulating sort of way"—it seems fair to observe that KFI provides a peculiar and very selective view of what's going on in the world.

Ms. B.'s description turns out to be loaded in a number of ways. The role of news and information versus personal and persona-driven stuff on the *John Ziegler Show*, for example, is a matter that Mr. Z. and his producer see very differently. Emiliano Limon, who's worked at the station for over a decade and believes he knows its audience, sees "two distinct eras at KFI. The first was the opinion-driven, personal, here's-my-take-on-things era. The second is the era we're in right now, putting the information first." Emiliano refers to polls he's seen indicating that most people in southern California get their news from local TV newscasts and Jay Leno's monologue on the *Tonight* show. "We go on the presumption that the average driver, average listener, isn't reading the news the way we are. We read *everything*." In fact, this voracious news-reading is a big part of Emiliano's job. He is, like most talk-radio producers, a virtuoso on the Internet, and he combs through a daily list of sixty national papers, 'zines, and blogs, and he believes that his and KFI's main function is to provide "a kind of executive news summary" for busy listeners. In a separate Q & A, though, Mr. Ziegler's take on the idea of his show's providing news is wholly different: "We're trying to get away from that, actually. The original thought was that this would be mostly an informational show, and now we're trying to get a little more toward personality" ... which, since Mr. Z. makes a point of not having a special on-air persona, means more stuff about himself, John Ziegler—his experiences, his résumé, his political and cultural outlook and overall philosophy of life.

(3)

If we're willing to disregard the complicating precedents of Joe Pyne and Alan Burke, then the origins of contemporary political talk radio can be traced to three phenomena of the 1980s. The first of these involved AM music stations' getting absolutely murdered by FM, which could broadcast music in stereo and allowed for much better fidelity on high and low notes. The human voice, on the other hand, is mid-range and doesn't require high fidelity. The eighties' proliferation of talk formats on the AM band also provided new careers for some music deejays—

FOR THOSE OUTSIDE SOUTHERN CA Haidl, the teenage son of an Orange County Asst. Sheriff, is accused, together with some chums, of gang-raping an unconscious girl at a party two or three years ago. Rocket scientists all, the perps had videotaped the whole thing and then managed to lose the tape, which eventually found its way to the police.



[meaning for the station in its current talk format, which started sometime in the eighties. KFI itself has been on the air since 1922—the "FI" actually stands for "Farm Information."]

Again, this sort of claim seems a little tough to reconcile with the actual news that KFI concentrates on, but—as Mr. Z. himself once pointedly observed during a Q & A—interviewing somebody is not the same as arguing with him over every last little thing.

(with whom Emiliano, from all indications, does not enjoy a very chummy or simpatico relationship, although he's always a master of tact and circumspection on the subject of Mr. Z.)

The upshot here is that there's a sort of triangular dissonance about the *John Ziegler Show* and how best to stimulate LA listeners. From all available evidence, Robin Bertolucci wants the program to be mainly info-driven (according to KFI's particular definition of info), but she wants the information heavily editorialized and infused with 'tude and in-your-face energy. Mr. Ziegler interprets this as the P.D.'s endorsing his talking a lot about himself, which Emiliano Limon views as an antiquated, small-market approach that is not going to be very interesting to people in Los Angeles, who tend to get more than their share of colorful personality and idiosyncratic opinion just in the course of their normal day. If Emiliano is right, then Mr. Z. may simply be too old-school and self-involved for KFI, or at least not yet aware of how different the appetites of a New York or LA market are from those of a Louisville or Raleigh.

(famous "confrontational" talk hosts of the sixties)

TRINETTE REED/CORBIS



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e.g., Don Imus, Morton Downey Jr.—whose chatty personas didn't fit well with FM's all-about-the-music ethos.

The second big factor was the repeal, late in Ronald Reagan's second term, of what was known as the Fairness Doctrine. This was a 1949 FCC rule designed to minimize any possible restrictions on free speech caused by limited access to broadcasting outlets. The idea was that, as one of the conditions for receiving an FCC broadcast license, a station had to "devote reasonable attention to the coverage of controversial issues of public importance," and consequently had to provide "reasonable, although not necessarily equal" opportunities for opposing sides to express their views. Because of the Fairness Doctrine, talk stations had to hire and program symmetrically: if you had a three-hour program whose host's politics were on one side of the ideological spectrum, you had to have another long-form program whose host more or less spoke for the other side. Weirdly enough, up through the mid-eighties it was usually the U.S. right that benefited most from the Doctrine. Pioneer talk syndicator Ed McLaughlin, who managed San Francisco's KGO in the 1960s, recalls that "I had more liberals on the air than I had conservatives or even moderates for that matter, and I had a hell of a time finding the other voice."

KGO happens to be the station where Ms. Robin Bertolucci, fresh out of Cal-Berkeley, first broke into talk radio.

(except, obviously, for some restrictions on naughty language)

CONTAINS WHAT MIGHT BE PERCEIVED AS EDITORIAL ELEMENTS
It seems only fair and balanced to observe, from the imagined perspective of a Neal Boortz or John Ziegler, that Minow's old distinction reflected exactly the sort of controlling, condescending, nanny-state liberal attitude that makes government regulation such a bad idea. For how and why does a federal bureaucrat like Newton Minow get to decide what "the public interest" is? Why not respect the American people enough to let the public itself decide what interests it? Of course, this sort of objection depends on precisely the collapse of "the public interest" into "what happens to interest the public" that liberals object to. For the distinction between these two is *itself* liberal, as is the idea of a free press's and broadcast media's special responsibilities—"liberal" in the sense of being rooted in a concern for the common good over and above the preferences of individual citizens. The point is that the debate over things like the Fairness Doctrine and the proper responsibility of broadcasters quickly hits ideological bedrock on both sides.

DITTO (Which does indeed entail government's arrogating the power to decide what that common good is, it's true. On the other hand, the idea is that at least government officials are elected, or appointed by elected representatives, and thus are somewhat accountable to the public they're deciding for. What appears to drive liberals most crazy about the right's conflation of "common good"/"public interest" with "what wins in the market" is the conviction that it's all a scam, that what the deregulation of industries like broadcasting, health care, and energy really amounts to is the subordination of the public's interests to the financial interests of large corporations. Which is, of course, all part of a very deep, serious national argument about the role and duties of government that America's having with itself right now. It is an argument that's not being plumbed at much depth on political talk radio, though—at least not the more legitimate, non-wacko claims of some on the left [a neglect that then strengthens liberal suspicions that all these conservative talk hosts are just spokesholes for their corporate masters ... and around and around it all goes].)

The Fairness Doctrine's repeal was part of the sweeping deregulations of the Reagan era, which aimed to liberate all sorts of industries from government interference and allow them to compete freely in the marketplace. The old, Rooseveltian logic of the Doctrine had been that since the airwaves belonged to everyone, a license to profit from those airwaves conferred on the broadcast industry some special obligation to serve the public interest. Commercial radio broadcasting was not, in other words, originally conceived as just another for-profit industry; it was supposed to meet a higher standard of social responsibility. After 1987, though, just another industry is pretty much what radio became, and its only real responsibility now is to attract and retain listeners in order to generate revenue. In other words, the sort of distinction explicitly drawn by FCC Chairman Newton Minow in the 1960s—namely, that between "the public interest" and "merely what interests the public"—no longer exists.

The crucial connection with the F.D.'s repeal was not Rush's show but that show's syndicatability. A station could now purchase and air three daily hours of Limbaugh without being committed to programming another three hours of Sierra Club or Urban League or something.

More or less on the heels of the Fairness Doctrine's repeal came the West Coast and then national syndication of *The Rush Limbaugh Show* through Mr. McLaughlin's EFM Media. Limbaugh is the third great progenitor of today's political talk radio partly because he's a host of extraordinary, once-in-a-generation talent and charisma—bright, loquacious, witty, complexly authoritative—whose show's blend of news, entertainment, and partisan analysis became the model for legions of

EFM Media, named for Edward F. McLaughlin, was a sort of Old Testament patriarch of modern syndication, although Mr. McL. tended to charge subscribing stations cash instead of splitting the Clock, because he wanted a low spot load that would give Rush maximum air time to build his audience.

BETTMAN/CORBIS



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In truth, Rush's disdain for the "liberal press" somewhat recalls good old Spiro Agnew's attacks on the Washington press corps (as in "nattering nabobs," "hopeless, hysterical hypochondriacs," etc.), with the crucial difference being that Agnew's charges always came off as thuggish and pathetic *in that "liberal press,"* which at the time was the only vector for their transmission. Because of his own talent and the popularity of his show, Rush was able to move partisan distrust for the mainstream "liberal media" into the mainstream itself.

imitators. But he was also the first great promulgator of the Mainstream Media's Liberal Bias idea. This turned out to be a brilliantly effective rhetorical move, since the MMLB concept functioned simultaneously as a standard around which Rush's audience could rally, as an articulation of the need for right-wing (i.e., unbiased) media, and as a mechanism by which any criticism or refutation of conservative ideas could be dismissed (either as biased or as the product of indoctrination by biased media). Boiled way down, the MMLB thesis is able both to exploit and to perpetuate many conservatives' dissatisfaction with extant media sources—and it's this dissatisfaction that cements political talk radio's large and loyal audience.

JUST CLEAR-EYED, DISPASSIONATE REASON Notwithstanding all sorts of interesting other explanations, the single biggest reason why left-wing talk-radio experiments like Air America or the Ed Schultz program are not likely to succeed, at least not on a national level, is that their potential audience is just not dissatisfied enough with today's mainstream news sources to feel that it has to patronize a special type of media to get the unbiased truth.

In the best Rush Limbaugh tradition, Mr. Ziegler takes pride in his on-air sense of humor. His media criticism is often laced with wisecracks, and he likes to leaven his show's political and cultural analyses with timely ad-lib gags, such as "It's maybe a good thing that Catholics and Muslims don't tend to marry. If they had a kid, he'd grow up and then, what, abuse some child and then blow him up?" And he has a penchant for comic maxims ("Fifty percent of all marriages are confirmed failures, while the other fifty percent end in divorce"; "The female figure is the greatest known evidence that there might be a God, but the female psyche is an indication that this God has a very sick sense of humor") that he uses on the air and then catalogues as "Zieglerisms" on his KFI Web site.

Mr. Z. can also, when time and the demands of prep permit, go long-form. In his program's final hour for May 22, he delivers a mock commencement address to the Class of 2004, a piece of prepared sit-down comedy that is worth excerpting, verbatim, as a sort of keyhole into the professional psyche of Mr. John Ziegler:

Again, this is all better, and arguably funnier, when delivered aloud in Mr. Z.'s distinctive way.

> Class of 2004, congratulations on graduation ... I wish to let you in on a few secrets that those of you who are not completely brain-dead will eventually figure out on your own, but, if you listen to me, will save a lot of time and frustration. First of all, most of what you have been taught in your academic career is not true. I am not just talking about the details of history that have been distorted to promote the liberal agenda of academia. I am also referring to the big-picture lessons of life as well. The sad truth is that, contrary to what most of you have been told, you *cannot* do or be anything you want. The vast majority of you ... will be absolutely miserable in whatever career you choose or are forced to endure. You will most likely hate your boss because they will most likely be dumber than you think you are, and they will inevitably screw you at every chance they get ... The boss will not be the only stupid person you encounter in life. The vast majority of people are *much, much* dumber than you have ever been led to believe. Never forget this. And just like people are far dumber than you have been led to believe, they are also *far* more dishonest than anyone is seemingly willing to admit to you. If you have any doubt as to whether someone is telling you the truth, it is a safe bet to assume that they are lying to you ... Do not trust anyone unless you have some sort of significant leverage over him or her and they *know* that you have that leverage over them. Unless this condition exists, anyone—and I mean *anyone*—can and probably will stab you in the back.

EDITORIAL QUIBBLE It's unclear just when in college Mr. Z. thinks students are taught that they can do or be anything. A good part of what he considers academia's leftist agenda, after all, consists in teaching kids about social and economic stratification, inequalities, uneven playing fields—all the U.S. realities that actually limit possibilities for some people.

(*if conservatively* disposed, please substitute "allegedly")

That is about one sixth of the address, and for the most part it speaks for itself.

One of many intriguing things about Mr. Ziegler, though, is the contrast between his deep cynicism about backstabbing and the naked, seemingly self-destructive candor with which he'll discuss his life and career. This

The best guess re Mr. Z.'s brutal on-record frankness is that either (a) the host's on- and off-air personas really are identical, or (b) he regards speaking to a magazine correspondent as just one more part of his job, which is to express himself in a maximally stimulating way (there was a tape recorder out, after all).

MARK PETERSON/CORBIS



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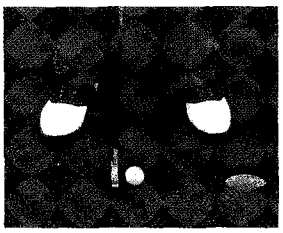
candor becomes almost paradoxical in Q & As with an outside correspondent, a stranger whom Mr. Z. has no particular reason to trust at those times when he winces after saying something and asks that it be struck from the record. As it happens, however, nearly all of what follows is from an autobiographical time-line volunteered by John Ziegler in late May '04 over a very large medium-rare steak. Especially interesting is the time-line's mixture of raw historical fact and passionate editorial opinion, which Mr. Z. blends so seamlessly that one really can believe he discerns no difference between them.

(for a magazine, moreover, that pretty much everyone around KFI regards as a chattering-class organ of the most elitist liberal kind )

(while both eating and watching a Lakers playoff game on a large-screen high-def TV, which latter was the only condition he placed on the interview)

1967–1989: Mr. John Ziegler grows up in suburban Philadelphia, the elder son of a financial manager and a homemaker. All kinds of unsummarizable evidence indicates that Mr. Z. and his mother are very close. In 1984, he is named High School Golfer of the Year by the *Bucks County Courier Times*. He's also a three-year golf letterman at Georgetown, where his liberal arts studies turn out to be "a great way to prepare for a life of being unemployed, which I've done quite a bit of."



1989–1995: Mr. Z.'s original career is in local TV sports. He works for stations in and around Washington DC, in Steubenville OH, and finally in Raleigh NC. Though sports news is what he's wanted to do ever since he was a little boy, he hates the jobs: "The whole world of sports and local news is so disgusting ... local TV news is half a step above prostitution."

(especially the one at Raleigh's WLFL Fox 22—"My boss there was the worst boss in the history of bosses")

1994–1995: Both personally and professionally, this period constitutes a dark night of the soul for John Ziegler. Summer '94: O.J. Simpson's ex-wife is brutally murdered. Fall '94: Mr. Ziegler's mother is killed in a car crash. Winter '95: During his sportscast, Mr. Z. makes "an incredibly tame joke about O.J. Simpson's lack of innocence" w/r/t his wife's murder, which draws some protest from Raleigh's black community. John Ziegler is eventually fired from WLFL because the station "caved in to Political Correctness." The whole nasty incident marks the start of (a) Mr. Z.'s deep, complex hatred for all things PC, and (b) "my history with O.J." He falls into a deep funk, decides to give up sports broadcasting, "pretty much gave up on life, actually." Mr. Z. spends his days watching the O.J. Simpson trial on cable television, often sitting through repeat broadcasts of the coverage late at night; and when O.J. is finally acquitted, "I was nearly suicidal." Two psychiatrist golf buddies talk him into going on antidepressants, but much of the time O.J. is still all Mr. Ziegler can think and talk about. "It got so bad—you'll find this funny—at one point I was so depressed that it was my goal, assuming that he'd be acquitted and that [O.J.'s] Riviera Country Club wouldn't have the guts to kick him out, that I was going to become a caddy at Riviera, knock him off, and see whether or not [a certain lawyer Mr. Z. also played golf with, whose name is here omitted] could get me off on jury nullification. That's how obsessed I was." The lawyer/golfer/friend's reaction to this plan is not described.

?!

Late 1995: Mr. Z. decides to give life and broadcasting another shot. Figuring that "maybe my controversial nature would work better on talk radio," he takes a job as a weekend fill-in host for a station in Fuquay-Varina NC—"the worst talk-radio station on the planet ... to call the station owner a redneck was insulting to rednecks"—only to be abruptly fired when the station switches to an automated Christian-music format.

Early 1996: "I bought, actually *bought*, time on a Raleigh talk-radio station" in order to start "putting together a Tape," although Mr. Z. is good enough on the air that they soon put him on as a paid host. What happens, though, is that this station uses a certain programming consultant, whose name is being omitted—"a pretty big name in the industry, who [however] is a *snake*, and, I believe, extremely overrated—and he at first really took a shine to me, and then told me, *told me*, to do a show on how I got fired from the TV job, and I did the show," which evidently involves retelling the original tame O.J. joke, after which the herpetic consultant stands idly by as the station informs Mr. Z. that "'We're done with you, no thank you,' which was another blow."

A Tape is sort of the radio/TV equivalent of an artist's portfolio.

As Mr. Z. explains it, consultants work as freelance advisers to different stations' Program Directors—"They sort of give the P.D. a cover if he hires somebody and it doesn't work out."

GETTY IMAGES



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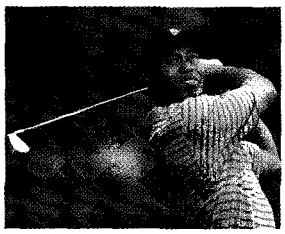
(the whole story of which is very involved and takes up almost half a microcassette)

(whom the host reveres—a standing gag on his KFI program is that Mr. Z. is a deacon in the First Church of Tiger Woods)



For those unfamiliar with Tom Leykis: Imagine Howard Stern without the cleverness.

In the Q & A itself, Mr. Z. goes back and forth between actually using the N-word and merely referring to it as "the N-word," without apparent pattern or design.

EDITORIAL OPINION This is obviously a high-voltage area to get into, but for what it's worth, John Ziegler does not appear to be a racist as "racist" is generally understood. What he is is more like very, very insensitive—although Mr. Z. himself would despise that description, if only because "insensitive" is now such a PC shibboleth. Actually, though, it is in the very passion of his objection to terms like "insensitive," "racist," and "the N-word" that his real problem lies. Like many other post-Limbaugh hosts, John Ziegler seems unable to differentiate between (1) cowardly, hypocritical acquiescence to the tyranny of Political Correctness and (2) judicious, compassionate caution about using words that cause pain to large groups of human beings, especially when there are several less upsetting words that can be used. Even though there is plenty of stuff for reasonable people to dislike about Political Correctness as a dogma, there is also something creepy about the brutal, self-righteous glee with which Mr. Z. and other conservative hosts defy all PC conventions. If it causes you real pain to hear or see something, and I make it a point to inflict that thing on you merely because I object to your reasons for finding it painful, then there's something wrong with my sense of proportion, or my recognition of your basic humanity, or both.

(just one person's opinion . . .)

THIS, TOO (And let's be real: spelling out a painful word is no improvement. In some ways, it's worse than using the word outright, since spelling it could easily be seen as implying that the people who are upset by the word are also too dumb to spell it. What's puzzling here is that Mr. Ziegler seems much too bright and self-aware not to understand this.)

1996–1997: Another radio consultant recommends Mr. Z. for a job at WWTN, a Nashville talk station, where he hosts an evening show that makes good Book and is largely hassle-free for several months. Of his brief career at WWTN, the host now feels that "I kind of self-destructed there, actually, in retrospect. I got frustrated with management. I was right, but I was stupid as well." The trouble starts when Tiger Woods wins the 1997 Masters. As part of his commentary on the tournament, Mr. Z. posits on-air that Tiger constitutes living proof of the fact that "not all white people are racists." His supporting argument is that "no white person would ever think of Tiger as a nigger," because whites draw a mental distinction "between people who just happen to be black and people who act like niggers." His reason for broadcasting the actual word "nigger"? "This all goes back to O.J. I hated the fact that the media treated viewers and listeners like children by saying 'Mark Fuhrman used the N-word.' I despised that, and *I* think it gives the word too much power. Plus there's the whole hypocrisy of how black people can use it and white people can't. I was young and naive and thought I could stand on principle." As part of that principled stand, Mr. Z. soon redeploys the argument and the word in a discussion of boxer Mike Tyson, whereupon he is fired, "even though there was very little listener reaction." As Mr. Z. understands it, the reason for his dismissal is that "a single black employee complained," and WWTN's parent, "a lily-white company," feared that it was "very vulnerable" to a discrimination lawsuit.

1998–1999: Mr. Z. works briefly as a morning fill-in at Nashville's WLAC, whose studios are right across the street from the station that just fired him. From there, he is hired to do overnights at WWDB, an FM talk station in Philadelphia, his home town. There are again auspicious beginnings . . . "except my boss, [the P.D. who hired him], is completely unstable and ends up punching out a consultant, and gets fired. At that point I'm totally screwed—I have nobody who's got my back, and everybody's out to get me." Mr. Z. is suddenly fired to make room for syndicated raunchmeister Tom Leykis, then is quickly rehired when listener complaints get Leykis's program taken off the air . . . then is refired a week later when the station juggles its schedule again. Mr. Z. on his time at WWDB: "I should have sued those bastards."

Q: So what exactly is the point of a host's having a contract if the station can evidently just up and fire you whenever they feel like it?

A: "The only thing a contract's worth in radio is how much they're going to pay you when they fire you. And if they fire you 'For Cause,' then they don't have to pay you anything."

2000: John Ziegler moves over to WIP, a famous Philadelphia sports-talk station. "I hated it, but I did pretty well. I can do sports, obviously, and it was also a big political year." But there is both a general problem and a specific problem. The general problem is that "The boss there, [name omitted], is an evil, evil, evil, *evil* man. If God said, 'John, you get one person to kill for free,' this would be the man I would kill. And I would make it brutally painful." The specific problem arises when "Mike Tyson holds a press conference, and calls himself a nigger. And I can't resist—I mean, here I've gotten fired in the past for using the word in relation to a person who calls *himself* that now. I mean, my God. So I tell the story [of having used the word and gotten fired for it] on the air, but I do not use the N-word—I *spell* the N-word, every single time, to cover my ass, and to also make a point of the absurdity of the whole thing. And we get one, *one*, postcard, from a total lunatic black person—misspellings, just clearly a lunatic. And [Mr. Z.'s boss at WIP] calls me in and says, 'John, I think you're a racist.' Now, first of all, *this guy* is a racist, I mean he is a *real* racist. I am anything but a racist, but to be called that by *him* just made my blood boil. I mean, life's too short to be working overnights for this fucking bastard." A day or two later Mr. Z. is fired, For Cause, for spelling the N-word on-air.

Q: It sounds like you've got serious personal reasons for disliking Political Correctness.

A: "Oh my God, yes. My whole life has been ruined by it. I've lost

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relationships, I can't get married, I can't have kids, all because of Political Correctness. I can't put anybody else through the crap I've been through. I can't do it."

2001: While writing freelance columns for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Philadelphia Daily News*, Mr. Ziegler also gets work at a small twenty-four-hour Comcast cable-TV network in Philly, where he's a writer and commentator on a prime-time issues-related talk show. Although Comcast is "an evil, evil, evil company, [which] created that network for the sole purpose of giving blowjobs to politicians who vote on Comcast legislation," Mr. Z. discovers that "I'm actually really good at talk TV. I was the best thing that ever happened to this show. I actually ended up winning an Emmy, which is ironic." There are, however, serious and irresolvable problems with a female producer on the show, the full story of which you are going to be spared (mainly because of legal worries).

2002: John Ziegler is hired as the mid-morning host at Clear Channel's WHAS in Louisville, which Arbitron lists as the fifty-fifth largest radio market in the U.S. According to a local paper, the host's "stormy, thirteen-month tenure in Louisville was punctuated by intrigue, outrage, controversy and litigation." According to John Ziegler, "The whole story would make a great movie—in fact, my whole life would make a great movie, but this in particular would make a great movie." Densely compressed synopsis: For several quarters, Mr. Z.'s program is a great success in Louisville. "I'm doing huge numbers—in one Book I got a fifteen share, which is ridiculous." He is also involved in a very public romance with one Darcie Divita, a former LA Lakers cheerleader who is part of a morning news show on the local Fox TV affiliate. The relationship is apparently Louisville's version of Ben & J.Lo, and its end is not amicable. In August '03, prompted by callers' questions on his regular "Ask John Anything" feature, Mr. Z. makes certain on-air comments about Ms. Divita's breasts, underwear, genital grooming, and libido. Part of the enduring controversy over John Ziegler's firing, which occurs a few days later, is exactly how much those comments and/or subsequent complaints from listeners and the Louisville media had to do with it. Mr. Z. has a long list of reasons for believing that his P.D. was really just looking for an excuse to can him. As for all the complaints, Mr. Z. remains bitter and perplexed: (1) "The comments I made about Darcie's physical attributes were extremely positive in nature"; (2) "Darcie had, in the past, *volunteered* information about her cleavage on my program"; (3) "I've gone much further with other public figures without incident ... I mocked [Kentucky Governor] Paul Patton for his inability to bring Tina Conner to orgasm, [and] no one from management ever even mentioned it to me."

John Ziegler on why he thinks he was hired for the Live and Local job by KFI: "They needed somebody 'available.'" And on the corporate logic behind his hiring: "It's among the most bizarre things I've ever been involved in. To simultaneously be fired by Clear Channel and negotiate termination in a market where I had immense value and be courted by the same company in a market where I had no current value is beyond explicable."

Mr. Z. on talk radio as a career: "This is a terrible business. I'd love to quit this business." On why, then, he accepted KFI's offer: "My current contract would be by far the toughest for them to fire me of anyplace I've been."

Mr. Z. explains that he's referring here to the constant moving around and apartment-hunting and public controversy caused by the firings. His sense of grievance and loss seems genuine. But one should also keep in mind how vital, for political talk hosts in general, is this sense of embattled persecution—by the leftist mainstream press, by slick Democratic operatives, by liberal lunatics and identity politics and PC and rampant cynical pandering. All of which provides the constant conflict required for good narrative and stimulating radio. Not, in John Ziegler's case, that any of his anger and self-pity is contrived—but they can be totally real and still function as parts of the skill set he brings to his job.

A corollary possibility: The reason why the world as interpreted by many hosts is one of such thoroughgoing selfishness and cynicism and fear is that these are qualities of the talk-radio industry they are part of, and they (like professionals everywhere) tend to see their industry as a reflection of the real world.

Here, some of John Ziegler's specific remarks about Darcie Divita are being excised at his request. It turns out that Ms. Divita is suing both the host and WHAS—Mr. Z.'s deposition is scheduled for summer '04.

RENA MACURA/AP PHOTOS

(after what Ms. Bertolucci characterizes as "a really big search around the country")

Mr. Z. explains the scare quotes around "available" as meaning that the experimental gig didn't offer the sort of compensation that could lure a large-market host away from another station. He describes his current KFI salary as "in the low six figures."

Compared with many talk-radio hosts, John Ziegler is unusually polite to on-air callers. Which is to say that he doesn't yell at them, call them names, or hang up while they're speaking, although he does get frustrated with some calls. But there are good and bad kinds of frustration, stimulation-wise. Hence the delicate art of call screening. The screener's little switchboard and computer console are here in the Airmix room, right up next to the studio window.

*JZS* Producer Emiliano Limon: "There are two types of callers. You've got your hard-core talk-radio callers, who just like hearing themselves on-air"—these listeners will sometimes vary the first names and home cities



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Vince (who is either a deep professional admirer or a titanic suck-up) states several times that John Ziegler is excellent with callers, dutifully referring to him each time as "Zig."

'Mondo Hernandez confirms on-record that Vince's screener voice sounds like someone talking around a huge bong hit.

NexGen (a Clear Channel product) displays a Richterish-looking sound wave, of which all different sizes of individual bits can be highlighted and erased in order to tighten the pacing and compress the sound bite. It's different from 'Mondo's Cashbox, which tightens things automatically according to pre-set specs; using NexGen requires true artistry. Emiliano knows the distinctive vocal wave patterns of George W. Bush, Bill O'Reilly, Sean Hannity, and certain others well enough that he can recognize them on the screen without any sound or ID. He is so good at using NexGen that he manages to make the whole high-stress Cut Sheet thing look dull.

'Mondo and Vince clearly enjoy each other, exchanging "*puto*" and "*chilango*" with brotherly ease. When Vince takes a couple days off, it becomes difficult to get 'Mondo to say anything about anything, Doritos or no.

Q (based on seeing some awfully high minute-counts in some people's colored boxes on Vince's display): How long will callers wait to get on the air?

Emiliano Limon: "We get some who'll wait for the whole show. [Laughs] If they're driving, what else do they have to do?"

Q: If a drunk driver calls in, do you have to notify the police or something?

A: "Well, this is why screening is tricky. You'll get, say, somebody calling in saying they're going to commit suicide—sometimes you have to refer the call. But sometimes you're getting pranked. Keep in mind, we're in an area with a lot of actors and actresses anxious to practice their craft. [Now his feet really are up on the table.] I remember we had Ross Perot call in one time, it sounded just like him, and actually he really was due to be on the show but not for an hour, and now he's calling saying he needs to be on right now because of a schedule change. Very convincing, sounded just like him, and I had to go, 'Uh, Mr. Perot, what's the name of your assistant press liaison?' Because I'd just talked to her a couple days prior. And he's [doing vocal impression]: 'Listen here, you all going to put me on the air or not?' And I'm: 'Umm, Mr. Perot, if you understand the question, please answer the question.' And he hangs up. [Laughs] But you would have *sworn* this was Ross Perot."

they give the screener, trying to disguise the fact that they've been calling in night after night—"and then there are the ones who just, for whatever reason, respond to the topic." Of these latter a certain percentage are wackos, but some wackos actually make good on-air callers. Assoc. prod. and screener Vince Nicholas: "The trick is knowing what kooks to get rid of and what to let through. People that are kooky on a particular issue—some of these Zig likes; he can bust on them and have fun with them. He likes it."

Vince isn't rude or brusque with the callers he screens out; he simply becomes more and more laconic and stoned-sounding over the headset as the person rants on, and finally says, "Whoa, gotta go." Especially obnoxious and persistent callers can be placed on Hold at the screener's switchboard, locking up their phones until Vince decides to let them go. Those whom the screener lets through enter a different, computerized Hold system in which eight callers at a time can be kept queued up and waiting, each designated on Mr. Z.'s monitor by a different colored box displaying a first name, city, one-sentence summary of the caller's thesis, and the total time waiting. The host chooses, cafeteria-style, from this array.

In his selections, Mr. Z. has an observable preference for female callers. Emiliano's explanation: "Since political talk radio is so white male–driven, it's good to get female voices in there." It turns out that this is an industry convention; the roughly 50-50 gender mix of callers one hears on most talk radio is because screeners admit a much higher percentage of female callers to the system.

One of the last things that Emiliano Limon always does before airtime is to use the station's NexGen Audio Editing System to load various recorded sound bites from the day's broadcast news onto a Prophet file that goes with the Cut Sheet. This is a numbered list of bites available for tonight's *John Ziegler Show*, of which both Mr. Z. and 'Mondo get a copy. Each bite must be precisely timed. It is an intricate, exacting process of editing and compilation, during which Mr. Z. often drums his fingers and looks pointedly at his watch as the producer ignores him and always very slowly and placidly edits and compresses and loads and has the Cut Sheet ready at the very last second. Emiliano is the sort of extremely chilled-out person who can seem to be leaning back at his station with his feet up on the Airmix table even when he isn't leaning back at all. He's wearing the *LA Times* shirt again. His own view on listener calls is that they are "overrated in talk radio," that they're rarely all that cogent or stimulating, but that hosts tend to be "overconcerned with taking calls and whether people are calling. Consider: This is the only type of live performance with absolutely no feedback from the audience. It's natural for the host to key in on the only real-time response he can get, which is the calls. It takes a long time with a host to get him to forget about the calls, to realize the calls have very little to do with the wider audience."

Vince, meanwhile, is busy at the screener's station. A lady with a heavy accent keeps calling in to say that she has vital information: a Czech newspaper has revealed that John Kerry is actually a Jew, that his grandfather changed his distinctively Jewish surname, and that this fact is being suppressed in the U.S. media and must be exposed. Vince finally tries putting her on punitive Hold, but her line's light goes out, which signifies that the lady has a cell phone and has disengaged by simply turning it off. Meaning that she can call back again as much as she likes, and that Vince is going to have to get actively rude. 'Mondo's great mild eyes rise from the board: "*Puto*, man, what's that about?" Vince, very flat and bored: "Kerry's a Jew." Emiliano: "Another big advent is the cell phone. Before cells you got mostly homebound invalids calling in. [Laughs] Now you get the driving invalid."

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(4)

Historically, the two greatest ratings periods ever for KFI AM-640 have been the Gray Davis gubernatorial recall and the O.J. Simpson trial. Now, in early June '04, the tenth anniversary of the Ron Goldman/Nicole Brown Simpson murders is approaching, and O.J. starts to pop up once again on the cultural radar. And Mr. John Ziegler happens to be more passionate about the O.J. Simpson thing than maybe any other single issue, and feels that he "know[s] more about the case than anyone not directly involved," and is able to be almost unbearably stimulating about O.J. Simpson and the utter indubitability of his guilt. And the confluence of the murders' anniversary, the case's tabloid importance to the nation and business importance to KFI, and its deep personal resonance for Mr. Z. helps produce what at first looks like the absolute Monster talk-radio story of the month.

On June 3, in the third segment of the *John Ziegler Show*'s second hour, after lengthy discussions of the O.J. anniversary and the Michael Jackson case, Mr. Z. takes a phone call from one "Daryl in Temecula," an African-American gentleman who is "absolutely astounded they let a Klansman on the radio this time of night." The call, which lasts seven minutes and eighteen seconds and runs well over the :46 break, ends with John Ziegler's telling the audience, "That's as angry as I've ever gotten in the history of my career." And Vince Nicholas, looking awed and spent at his screener's station, pronounces the whole thing "some of the best talk radio I ever heard."

Some portions of the call are untranscribable because they consist mainly of Daryl and Mr. Z. trying to talk over each other. Daryl's core points appear to be (1) that Mr. Z. seems to spend all his time talking about black men like Kobe and O.J. and Michael Jackson—"Don't white people commit crimes?"—and (2) that O.J. was, after all, found innocent in a court of law, and yet Mr. Z. keeps "going on about 'He's guilty, he's guilty—'"

"He *is*," the host inserts.

Daryl: "He was acquitted, wasn't he?"

"That makes no difference as to whether or not he did it."

"O.J., Kobe: You just thrive on these black guys."

It is here that Mr. Z. begins to pick up steam. "Oh yeah, Daryl, right, I'm a racist. As a matter of fact, I often say, 'You know what? I just wish another black guy would commit a crime, because I hate black people so much.'"

Daryl: "I think you do have more to talk about on black guys. I think that's more '*news*'"... which actually would be kind of an interesting point to explore, or at least address; but Mr. Z. is now stimulated.

"As a matter of fact, Daryl, oftentimes when we go through who's committed the crimes, there are times when the white people who control the media, we get together and go, 'Oh, we can't talk about that one, because that was a white guy.' This is all a big conspiracy, Daryl. Except, to be serious for a second, Daryl, what really upsets me, assuming you're a black guy, is that you ought to be *ten* times more pissed off at O.J. Simpson than I am, because you know why?"

Daryl: "You can't tell me how I should feel. As a forty-year-old black man, I've seen racism for forty years."

Mr. Z. is starting to move his upper body back and forth excitedly in his chair. "I bet you have. I bet you have. And here's why you ought to be pissed off: Because, out of all the black guys who *deserved* to get a benefit of the doubt because of the history of racism which is real in this country, and which is insidious, the one guy—*the one guy*—who gets the benefit of all of that pain and suffering over a hundred years of history in this

Some of his personal reasons for this have been made clear. But the Simpson case also rings a lot of professional cherries for Mr. Ziegler as a host: sports, celebrity, race, racism, PC and the "race card," the legal profession, the U.S. justice system, sex, misogyny, miscegenation, and a lack of shame and personal accountability that Mr. Z. sees as just plain evil.

This annoys Alan LaGreen of Airwatch enough to cause him to snap at 'Mondo on an off-air channel (mainly because Alan LaGreen now ends up having to be the KFI Traffic Center during an interval in which he's supposed to be the Traffic Center for some country station); plus it pushes 'Mondo's skills with the Cashbox right to their limit in the hour's segment four.

It turns out to be impossible, off the air, to Q & A Mr. Ziegler about his certainty re O.J.'s guilt. Bring up anything that might sound like reservations, and Mr. Z. won't say a word—he'll angle his head way over to the side and look at you as if he can't tell whether you're trying to jerk him around or you're simply out of your mind.

It's different if you ask about O.J. Simpson *l'homme*, or about specific details of his psyche and marriage and lifestyle and golf game and horrible crimes. For instance, John Ziegler has a detailed and fairly plausible-sounding theory about O.J.'s motive for the murders, which boils down to Simpson's jealous rage over his ex-wife's having slept with Mr. Marcus Allen, a former Heisman Trophy winner and current (as of '94) NFL star. Mr. Z. can defend this theory with an unreproduceably long index of facts, names, and media citations, all of which you can ask him about if you keep your face and tone neutral and simply write down what he says without appearing to quibble or object or in any way question the host's authority on the subject.

(For instance, you cannot ask something like whether Ms. Simpson's liaison with Marcus Allen is a documented fact or just part of Mr. Z.'s theory—this will immediately terminate the Q & A.)

In case memories of the trial have dimmed, Mr. Z. is referring here to the defense team's famous playing of the race card, the suggestion that the LAPD wanted to frame O.J. because he was a miscegenating black, etc.

TINY EDITORIAL CORRECTION
Umm, four hundred?



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John Ziegler is now screeching—except that's not quite the right word. Pitch and volume have both risen ('Mondo's at the channel 7 controls trying to forestall peaking), but his tone is meant to connote a mix of incredulity and outrage, with the same ragged edge to the stressed syllables as—no kidding—Jackson's and Sharpton's. Daryl of Temecula, meantime, has been silenced by the sheer passion of the host's soliloquy ... and we should note that Daryl really has stopped speaking; it's not that Mr. Z. has turned off the volume on the caller's line (which is within his power, and which some talk-radio hosts do a lot, but Mr. Z. does not treat callers this way).

(Mr. Z. means the first *black* person—he's now so impassioned he's skipping words. [It never once sounds like babbling, though.])

country is the one guy who deserves it less than anybody else, who sold his race out, who tried to talk white, who only had white friends, who had his ass kissed all over the place because he decided he wasn't really a black guy, who was the first person in the history of this country ever accepted by white America, who was actually able to do commercial endorsements because he pretended to be white, and *that's the guy? That's the guy? That's the guy* who gets the benefit of that history, and that doesn't piss you off, *that doesn't piss you off?*" And then an abrupt decrescendo: "Daryl, I can assure you that the last thing I am is racist on this. This is the last guy who should benefit."

(voice breaking a bit here)

EDITORIAL OPINION Again, it's nothing so simple as that he doth protest too much; but it would be less discomfiting if Mr. Z. didn't feel he could so totally *assure Daryl of this—i.e., if Mr. Z. weren't so certain that his views are untainted by racism.* Not to mention that the assurance resonates strangely against all the host's vented spleen about a black man's "selling out his race" by "pretending to be white." Not, again, that Mr. Z. wears a pointy hood—but he seems weirdly unconscious of the fact that Simpson's ostensible betrayal of his race is something that only a member of that race really has the right to get angry about. No? If a white person gets angry about a black person's "pretending to be white," doesn't the anger come off far less as sympathy with the person's betrayed race than as antipathy for somebody who's trying to crash a party he doesn't belong at? (Or is Mr. Z. actually to be admired here for not giving a damn about how his anger comes off, for not buying into any of that it's-okay-for-a-black-person-to-say-it-but-not-okay-for-a-white-person stuff? And if so, why is it that his "selling out" complaints seem creepy and obtuse instead of admirable [although, of course, how his complaints "seem" might simply depend on the politics and sensitivities of the individual listener (such that the whole thing becomes not so much stimulating as exhausting)]?)

Is it wimpy or white-guiltish to believe that we're all at least a little bit racist in some of our attitudes or beliefs, or at any rate that it's not impossible that we are?

(Better than "the right" here might be "the rhetorical authority.")

And then June 4, the night following the Daryl interchange, turns out to be a climactic whirlwind of production challenges, logistical brinksmanship, meta-media outrage, Simpsonian minutiae, and Monster-grade stimulation. As is SOP, it starts around 7:00 P.M. in KFI's large central prep room, which is where all the local hosts and their producers come in to prepare for their shows.

The prep room, which station management sometimes refers to as the production office, is more or less the nerve center of KFI, a large, complexly shaped space perimetered with battered little canted desks and hutches and two-drawer file cabinets supporting tabletops of composite planking. There are beat-up computers and pieces of sound equipment and funny Scotch-taped bits of office humor (e.g., pictures with staffers' heads Photoshopped onto tabloid celebrities' bodies). Like the studio and Airmix, the prep room is also a D.P.H.-grade mess: half the overhead fluorescents are either out or flickering nauseously, and the gray carpet crunches underfoot, and the wastebaskets are all towering fire hazards, and many of the tabletops are piled with old books and newspapers. One window, which is hot to the touch, overlooks KFI's gated parking lot and security booth and the office of a Korean podiatrist across the street.

Overall, the layout and myriad tactical functions of the prep room are too complicated to try to describe this late in the game. At one end, it gives on to the KFI newsroom, which is a whole galaxy unto itself. At the other, comparatively uncluttered end is a set of thick, distinguished-looking doors leading off into the offices of the Station Manager, Director of Marketing &

The standard of professionalism in talk radio is one hour of prep for each hour on the air. But Mr. Ziegler, whose specialty in media criticism entails extra-massive daily consumption of Internet and cable news, professes to be "pretty much always prepping," at least during the times he's not asleep (3:00–10:00 A.M.) or playing golf (which since he's moved to LA he does just about every day, quite possibly by himself—all he'll say about it is "I have no life here").

There is also another large TV in the prep room, this one wired to a TiVo digital recording system so that anything from the day's cable news can be tagged, copied, and loaded into NexGen and Prophet. The TV gets only one channel at a time, but apparently certain cable stuff can also be accessed on one of the prep-room computers by a producer who knows what he's doing.

Examples of volumes pulled at random from the tabletops' clutter: Dwight Nichols's *God's Plans for Your Finances,* the Hoover Institution's *Education and Capitalism: How Overcoming Our Fear of Markets and Economics Can Improve America's Schools,* and Louis Barajas's *The Latino Journey to Financial Greatness.*



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Promotions, Program Director, and so on, with also a semi-attached former closet for the P.D.'s assistant, a very kindly and eccentric lady who's been at KFI for over twenty years and wears a high-tech headset that one begins, only over time, to suspect isn't really connected to anything.

(who's usually long gone by the time the *JZS* staff starts prepping)

There are three main challenges facing tonight's *John Ziegler Show*. One is that Emiliano Limon is off on certain personal business that he doesn't want described, and therefore Mr. Vince Nicholas is soloing as producer for the very first time. Another is that last night's on-air exchange with Daryl of Temecula is the type of intensely stimulating talk-radio event that cries out for repetition and commentary; Mr. Z. wants to rerun certain snippets of the call in a very precise order so that he can use them as jumping-off points for detailing his own "history with O. J." and explaining why he's so incandescently passionate about the case.

The third difficulty is that Simpson's big anniversary Q & A with Ms. Katie Couric is airing tonight on NBC's *Dateline*, and the cuts and discussions of the Daryl call are going to have to be interwoven with excerpts from what Mr. Z. refers to several times as "Katie's blowjob interview." An additional complication is that *Dateline* airs in Los Angeles from 8:00 to 10:00 P.M., and it has also now run teases for stories on the health hazards of the Atkins diet and the dangerously lax security in U.S. hotels. Assuming that *Dateline* waits and does the O. J. interview last (which it is clearly in the program's interests to do), then the interview's highlights will have to be recorded off TiVo, edited on NexGen, loaded onto Prophet, and queued up for the Cut Sheet all very quickly, since Mr. Z.'s opening segment starts at 10:06 and it's hard to fiddle with logistics once his show's under way.

"You're going to need to kick some ass tonight, bud," Mr. Z. tells Vince as he highlights bites in a transcript of Daryl's call, eliciting something very close to a salute.

Thus Vince spends 7:00–8:00 working two side-by-side computers, trying simultaneously to assemble the cuts from last night's call, load an MSNBC interview with Nicole Brown Simpson's sister directly into NexGen, and track down a Web transcript of tonight's *Dateline* (which on the East Coast has already aired) so that he and Mr. Z. can choose and record bites from the Couric thing in real time. 'Mondo, who is back board-opping the ISDN feed of 7:00–10:00's *Phil Hendrie Show*, nevertheless comes in from Airmix several times to stand behind Vince at the terminals, ostensibly to see what's going on but really to lend moral support. 'Mondo's shadow takes up almost half the room's east wall.

John Ziegler, who is understandably quite keyed up, spends some of the pre-*Dateline* time standing around with an extremely pretty News-department intern named Kyra, watching the MSNBC exchange with half an eye while doing his trademark stress-relieving thing of holding two golf balls and trying to align the dimples so that one ball stays balanced atop the other. He is wearing a horizontally striped green-and-white golf shirt, neatly pressed black shorts, and gleaming New Balance sneakers. He keeps saying that he cannot be*lieve* they're even giving Simpson air time. No one points out that his shock seems a bit naive given the business realities of network TV news, realities about which John Ziegler is normally very savvy and cynical. Kyra does venture to observe, quietly, that the Simpson thing draws even bigger ratings than today's Scott Peterson, who—

"Don't even compare the two," Mr. Z. cuts her off. "O.J.'s just in his own world in terms of arrogance."

Nobody ever ribs Mr. Z. about the manual golf-ball thing vis-à-vis, say, Captain Queeg's famous ball bearings. It is not that he wouldn't get the allusion; Mr. Z. is just not the sort of person one kids around with this way. After one mid-May appearance on *Scarborough Country*, re some San Diego schoolteachers getting suspended for showing the Nick Berg decapitation video in class, a certain unnamed person had tried joshing around with him, in an off-hand and lighthearted way, about a supposed very small facial tic that had kept appearing unbeknownst to John Ziegler whenever he'd used the phrase "wussification of America" on-camera; and Mr. Z. was, let's just say, unamused, and gave the person a look that chilled him to the marrow.

The designated *JZS* intern, meanwhile, is at the prep room's *John & Ken Show* computer, working (in Vince's stead) on a comic review feature called "What Have We Learned This Week?," which is normally a Friday standard but which there may or may not be time for tonight. At 7:45 P.M. it is still 90° out, and smoggy. The windows' light makes people

GREGORY PACE/CORBIS



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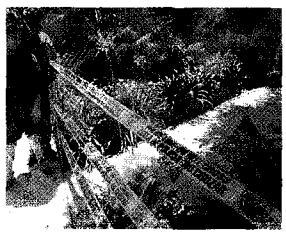
(negotiated ahead of time with Vince as the price for letting a mute, unobtrusive outside party observe tonight's prep)

'Mondo eventually starts taking plates of food back into Airmix with him.

(a UC-Irvine undergrad, name omitted)

(meaning the Bundy Drive crime scene, which Mr. Z. has evidently walked every inch of)



'Mondo can neither confirm nor deny that these supposedly outraged uninitiated callers are maybe themselves fakes, just more disembodied voices that Hendrie and his staff are creating, and that *maybe the real dupes are us, the initiated audience*, for believing that the callers are genuine dupes. 'Mondo has not, he confesses, ever considered this possibility, but he agrees that it would constitute "a serious mind-fuck" for KFI listeners.

(which Vince was able to find online, but which had to be specially reconfigured and printed in order to restore the original line breaks and transcript format of, this being one cause of all the running around between 8:00 and 8:30, as well as another reason why it took the *JZS* intern so long to finish his quatrain, which he is even now fidgeting in his chair and trying to decide on just the right moment to show to Mr. Z.)

Sure enough, within just weeks Emiliano Limon will have left KFI for a job at New York's WCBS.

It is a medical commonplace that bananas are good for ulcers.

look greenish in the areas where the room's fluorescents are low. A large spread of takeout chicken sits uneaten and expensively congealing. Mr. Z.'s intern spends nearly an hour composing a mock poem to Ms. Amber Frey, the mistress to whom Scott Peterson evidently read romantic verse over the phone. The poem's final version, which is "Roses are red / Violets are blue / If I find out you're pregnant / I'll drown your ass too," takes such a long time because of confusions about the right conjugation of "to drown."

"And to top it off," Mr. Z. is telling Kyra as her smile becomes brittle and she starts trying to edge away, "to top it off, he leaves Nicole's body in a place where the most likely people to find it are his *children*. It's just a fluke that couple found her. I don't know if you've ever walked by there, but it's really dark at night, and they were in a, like [gesturing, one golf ball in each hand], cave formation out at the front."

Sure enough, *Dateline* runs the anti-Atkins story first. For reasons involving laser printers and a special editing room off the on-air news cubicle, there's suddenly a lot of running back and forth.

In Airmix, 'Mondo is eating Koo Koo Roo's chicken while watching *Punk'd*, an MTV show where friends of young celebrities collude with the producers to make the celebrities think they're in terrible legal trouble. 'Mondo is very careful about eating anywhere near the mixing board. It's always around 60° in this room. On the board's channel 6 and the overhead speakers, Phil Hendrie is pretending to mediate between apoplectic callers and a man who's filing sexual-harassment charges against female co-workers who've gotten breast implants. For unknown reasons, a waist-high pile of disconnected computer keyboards has appeared in the Airmix room's north corner, just across the wall from KFI's Imaging studio, whose door is always double-locked.

It is only right that John Ziegler gets the spot directly in front of the prep room's TV, with everyone else's office chairs sort of fanned out to either side behind him. Seated back on his tailbone with his legs out and ankles crossed, Mr. Z. is able simultaneously to watch *Dateline*'s are-you-in-danger-at-luxury-hotels segment, to hear and help rearrange Vince's cuts from the MSNBC exchange, and to highlight those parts of the O.J.–Katie Couric transcript that he wants to make absolutely sure to have Vince load from TiVo into Prophet when the greedy bastards at *Dateline* finally air the interview. It must be said, too, that Vince is an impressive surprise as a producer. He's a veritable blur of all-business competence and technical savvy. There are none of Emiliano's stoic shrugs, *sotto* wisecracks, or passive-aggressive languor. Nor, tonight, is Vince's own slackerish stoner persona anywhere in view. It is the same type of change as when you put a fish back in the water and it seems to turn electric in your hand. Watching Vince and the host work so well as a team induces the night's first strange premonitory jolt: Emiliano's days are numbered.

The broadcast studio is strange when no one's in here. Through the soundproof window, 'Mondo's head looks small and far away as he inclines over the spot log. It seems like a lonely, cloistered place in which to be passionate about the world. Mr. Z.'s padded host chair is old and lists slightly to port; it's the same chair that John Kobylt sits in, and morning drive's Bill Handel, and maybe even Dr. Laura back in the day. The studio wastebaskets have been emptied, but the banana scent still lingers. It might simply be that John and/or Ken eats a lot of bananas during afternoon drive. All the studio's monitors are on, though none is tuned to NBC. On the Fox News monitor up over the digital clock, Sean Hannity and Susan Estrich are rerunning the Iowa Caucuses clip of Howard Dean screaming at the

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start of his concession speech. They play the scream over and over. Ms. Estrich is evidently filling in on *Hannity and Colmes*. "They have hatred for George W. Bush, but they don't have ideas," Sean Hannity says. "Where are the ideas on the left? Where is the thinking liberal?" Susan Estrich says, "I don't know. I don't have a full-time job on TV, so I can't tell you."

All multi-tasking ends when *Dateline*, after two teases and an extra-long spot break, finally commences the interview segment. It is Katie Couric and O.J. Simpson and Simpson's attorney in a living room that may or may not be real. One tends to forget how unusually, screen-fillingly large O.J.'s head is. Mr. Ziegler is now angled forward with his elbows on his knees and his fingers steepled just under his nose. Although he does, every so often, let loose with a "Katie Couric sucks!" or "Katie Couric should be fucking *shot!*," for the most part a person seated on the host's far flank has to watch his upper face—his right eye's and nostril's dilations—to discern when Mr. Z.'s reacting strongly or thinking about how he'll respond to some specific bit of Simpson's "sociopathic BS" when it's his turn to talk.

It's odd: if you've spent some time watching Mr. Z. perform in the studio, you can predict just what he'll look like, how his head and arms will move and eyes fill with life as he says certain things that it's all but sure he'll say on-air tonight, such as "I have some very, very strong opinions about how this interview was conducted," and "Katie Couric is a disgrace to journalism everywhere," and that O.J.'s self-presentation was "delusional and arrogant beyond all belief," and that the original trial jury was "a collection of absolute nimrods," and that to believe in Simpson's innocence, as Ms. Couric says a poll shows some 70 percent of African-Americans still do, "you have to be either crazy, deluded, or stupid—there are no other explanations."

To be fair, though, there truly are some dubious, unsettling things about the *Dateline* interview, such as for instance that NBC has acceded to O.J. Simpson's "no editing" condition for appearing, which used to be an utter taboo for serious news organizations. Or that O.J. gets to sit there looking cheery and unguarded even though he has his lawyer almost in his lap; or that most of Katie Couric's questions turn out to be Larry King–size fluffballs; or that O.J. Simpson responds to one of her few substantive questions—about 1994's eerie, slow-motion Bronco chase and its bearing on how O.J.'s case is still perceived—by harping on the fact that the chase "never ever, in three trials that I had, it never came up," as if that had anything to do with whatever his behavior in the Bronco really signified (and at which non-answer, and Ms. Couric's failure to press or follow up, Mr. Z. moans and smears his hand up and down over his face). Or that O.J.'s cheerful expression never changes when Katie Couric, leaning forward and speaking with a delicacy that's either decent or obscene, inquires whether his children ever ask him about the crime. And when someone in the arc of chairs around John Ziegler says, almost to himself, that the one pure thing to hope for here is that Simpson's kids believe he's innocent, Mr. Z. gives a snort of reply and states, very flatly, "They know, and he knows they know, that he did it." To which, in KFI's prep room, the best response would probably be compassion, empathy. Because one can almost feel it: what a bleak and merciless world this host lives in—believes, nay, knows for an absolute *fact* he lives in. I'll take doubt.

Vince's broad back is now to the TV and everyone around it as he uploads real-time TiVo feed into NexGen and edits per his host's written specs.

All of this John Ziegler will and does say on his program—although what no one in the prep room can know is that a second-hour Airwatch flash on the imminent death of Ronald W. Reagan will cut short Mr. Z.'s analysis and require a total, on-the-fly change of both subject and mood.

(who is in so many ways the efficient cause, ideologically and statutorily, of today's partisan media, and whose passing will turn out to be June's true Monster ...)

The only bit of genuine fun is during the interview's first commercial break, when the opening ad is for Hertz—*Hertz*, of old O.J.-running-through-airports-spots fame—and Mr. Z. throws his head back and asks if he's really seeing what he's seeing. Even Vince turns around in his chair to look. Hertz's placement of an ad here is a brilliant, disgusting, unforgettable piece of meta-meta-media marketing. It's impossible not to laugh ... and yet Mr. Z. doesn't. (Neither do the room's two interns, though that's only because they're too young to get the meta-reference.)

EDITORIALIZING, OR JUST STATING THE OBVIOUS? Plus there's the creepy question of why O.J. Simpson is doing a murder-anniversary TV interview at all. What on earth does he stand to gain from sitting there on-camera and letting tens of millions of people search his big face for guilt or remorse? Why subject himself to America's ghoulish fascination? And make no mistake: it is fascinating. The interview and face are riveting television entertainment. It's almost impossible to look away, or not to feel that special kind of guilty excitement in the worst, most greedy and indecent parts of yourself. You can really feel it—this is why drivers slow down to gape at accidents, why reporters put mikes in the faces of bereaved relatives, why the Haidl gang-rape trial is a hit single that merits heavy play, why the cruelest forms of reality TV and tabloid news and talk radio generate such numbers. But that doesn't mean the fascination is good, or even feels good. Aren't there parts of ourselves that are just better left unfed? If it's true that there are, and that we sometimes choose what we wish we wouldn't, then there is a very serious unanswered question at the heart of KFI's Sweeper: "More *Stimulating*" of what?

For instance, it's troubling that her delivery is that of someone who's choosing her words with great care, when clearly the words have already been chosen, the question scripted. Which would seem to mean she's acting.

(It goes without saying that this is just one person's opinion.)

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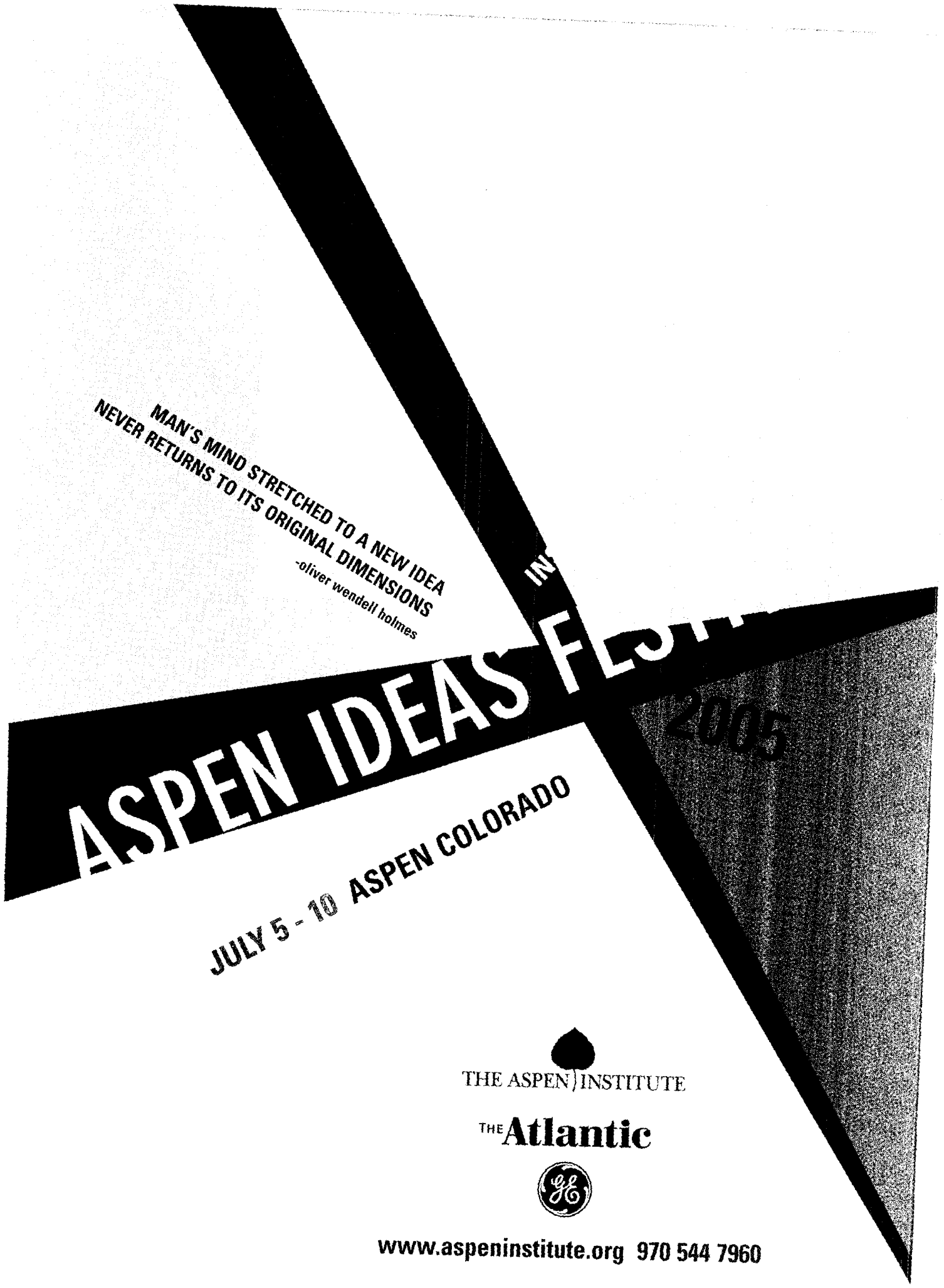


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# REHNQUIST THE GREAT?

*Even liberals may come to regard William Rehnquist as one of the most successful chief justices of the century*

BY JEFFREY ROSEN

In his thirty-four years on the Supreme Court, William Rehnquist participated enthusiastically in the annual Christmas party for the justices and their clerks. "He and I wrote the Christmas show the year I clerked for him, in 1975," recalls Craig M. Bradley, who now teaches law at Indiana University.

One carol that year was sung to the tune of "Angels From the Realms of Glory." It went like this: "Liberals from the realm of theory should adorn our highest bench / Though to crooks they're always chary / at police misdeeds they blench." ("'The word 'blench' came from Rehnquist," Bradley says. "I didn't know it meant 'blanch.'") The members of the chorus then fell to their knees and sang, "Save *Miranda*, save *Miranda*, save it from the Nixon Four." The so-called Nixon Four were Supreme Court Justices Warren Burger, Harry Blackmun, Lewis Powell, and, of course, Rehnquist.

Twenty-five years later, after having repeatedly ridiculed the constitutional soundness of the decision requiring police officers to read suspects their *Miranda* rights, Rehnquist voted to uphold it. "*Miranda* has become embedded in routine police practice to the point where the warnings have become part of our national culture," he wrote in a 7–2 opinion for the Court in *Dickerson* v. *U.S.*, in 2000. Rehnquist's apostasy provoked one of Justice Antonin Scalia's most vitriolic dissenting opinions. Joined by Justice Clarence Thomas, Scalia declared, "Today's judgment converts *Miranda* from a milestone of judicial overreaching into the very Cheops' Pyramid (or perhaps the Sphinx would be a better analogue) of judicial arrogance."

Rehnquist's evolution from *Miranda*'s leading critic to its improbable savior infuriated conservatives and confused liberals; but in fact it was emblematic of his career. Throughout his long tenure, liberals always simplistically lumped Rehnquist together with the other conservatives on the Court, whereas conservatives never fully embraced him as one of their own. Furthermore, liberals have never understood how significantly and frequently Rehnquist departed from doctrinaire conservative ideology, and conservatives have failed to grasp that his tactical flexibility was more effective than the rigid purity of Scalia and Thomas. In truth, Rehnquist carefully staked out a limbo between the right and the left and showed that it was a very good place to be. With exceptional efficiency and amiability he led a Court that put the brakes on some of the excesses of the Earl Warren era while keeping pace with the sentiments of a majority of the country—generally siding with economic conservatives and against cultural conservatives. As for judicial temperament, he was far more devoted to preserving tradition and majority rule than the generation of fire-breathing conservatives who followed him. And his administration of the Court was brilliantly if quietly effective, making him one of the most impressive chief justices of the past hundred years.

The chief justice, like each of his colleagues, has one vote; his greatest power lies in choosing who will write an opinion when he's in the majority—himself or another justice who he thinks will best reflect his views. On this score Rehnquist proved to be a master tactician, unlike his inept and pompous predecessor, Warren Burger, who infuriated his colleagues by changing his votes in order to seize the best opinions for himself and then losing his majorities. And Rehnquist's judicial philosophy also made it easier for him to reshape the Court in his own image. He was essentially a pragmatist who believed in certain core conservative values—primarily states' rights and convicting criminals—but didn't fuss too much about how he achieved his aims. In contrast, Scalia and Thomas are more concerned about ideological purity than about persuading a majority of their colleagues, which is why neither would make an effective chief.

One of Rehnquist's unique and abiding talents was for getting along with his ideological opponents. When he first joined the Court, at the age of forty-seven, he was taken under the wing of the liberal activist William O. Douglas, a fellow westerner who saw in the irreverent young conservative an incarnation of his youthful self. Rehnquist's other liberal colleagues were similarly impressed by his fairness and good nature: Thurgood Mar-

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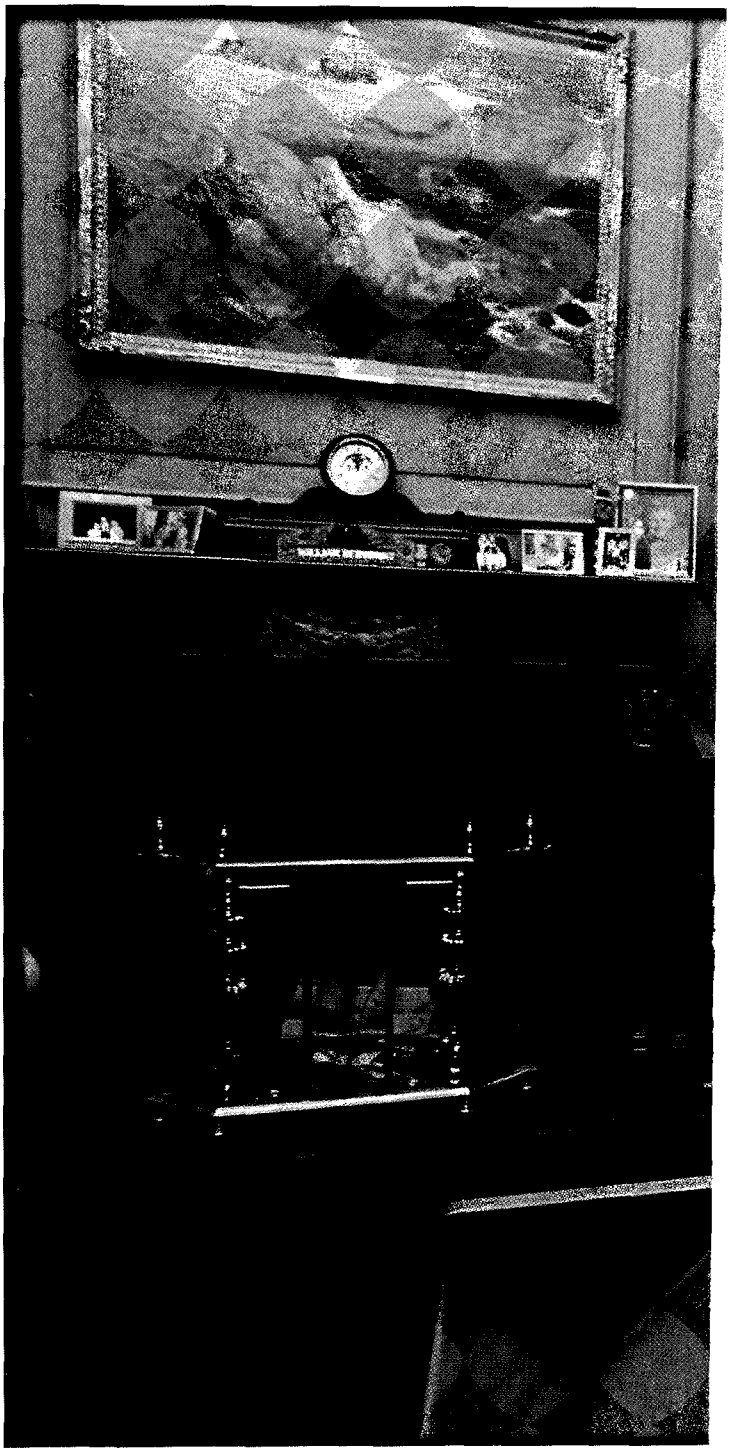
shall called Rehnquist "a great Chief Justice," and William Brennan described him as "the most all-around successful" chief he had known—including Earl Warren. On the current Court, Rehnquist has been praised frequently and effusively by Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who, despite her philosophical differences with the chief justice, admires his administrative skills so much that after the complicated campaign-finance case last term, she told clerks how happy she was that the rumors he was retiring weren't true. One former clerk remembers Rehnquist best for his sensitivity toward colleagues: "He was very concerned about hurt feelings among the justices, and he was very careful and observant of the way that certain memos or interactions would make other justices react or feel. He always avoided invective in his own memos, and smoothed over hurt feelings when other justices used it."

A hallmark of Rehnquist's rule was his unparalleled organizational skill: he got opinions out quickly and made the arguments run on time both in and out of court. When, in a rare interview last year, Charlie Rose asked him how he would most like to be remembered, Rehnquist said as a good administrator; he had tried, he said, to run "a relatively smoothly functioning Court." And he suggested that his ability to get along with a group of strong personalities reflected "a relatively passive nature," a "very high boiling point," and the ability to compromise.

**Liberals have never understood how significantly and frequently Rehnquist departed from doctrinaire conservative ideology, and conservatives have failed to grasp the effectiveness of his tactical flexibility.**

Certainly he was a creature of habit; his daily routine in his chambers remained the same for more than thirty years. He would arrive between 8:30 and 9:00, say hello to his two secretaries, go through his mail, and smoke a cigarette (for years he was a two-cigarettes-a-day man—no more, no less). At exactly 9:30 he would call in his clerks, gently reminding them, if they were even a minute late, that "the doctor doesn't wait for you." A trivia buff, he loved to test the mettle of his clerks at the morning meeting, asking them, for example, to name the five largest states in order of their area. He would often go to the University Club for a swim, to alleviate chronic back pain, and he usually left the office at 4:00. He was not known for taking work home with him. When he assigned the writing of an opinion to himself, he would set a deadline for the first draft ten days away and then start asking his clerks about



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it after a week. He was insistent that his fellow justices meet his exacting standards for punctuality, and would punish those who fell behind on their opinions (including the notoriously slow Harry Blackmun) by not assigning them new ones. And he ran an especially tight ship during the justices' private conferences, the twice weekly meetings after oral arguments, at which the justices cast their preliminary votes. Briskly going around the table, in order of seniority, to allow each justice to give his or her views, he refused to let discussion wander. Some colleagues complained that this format discouraged active debate, but



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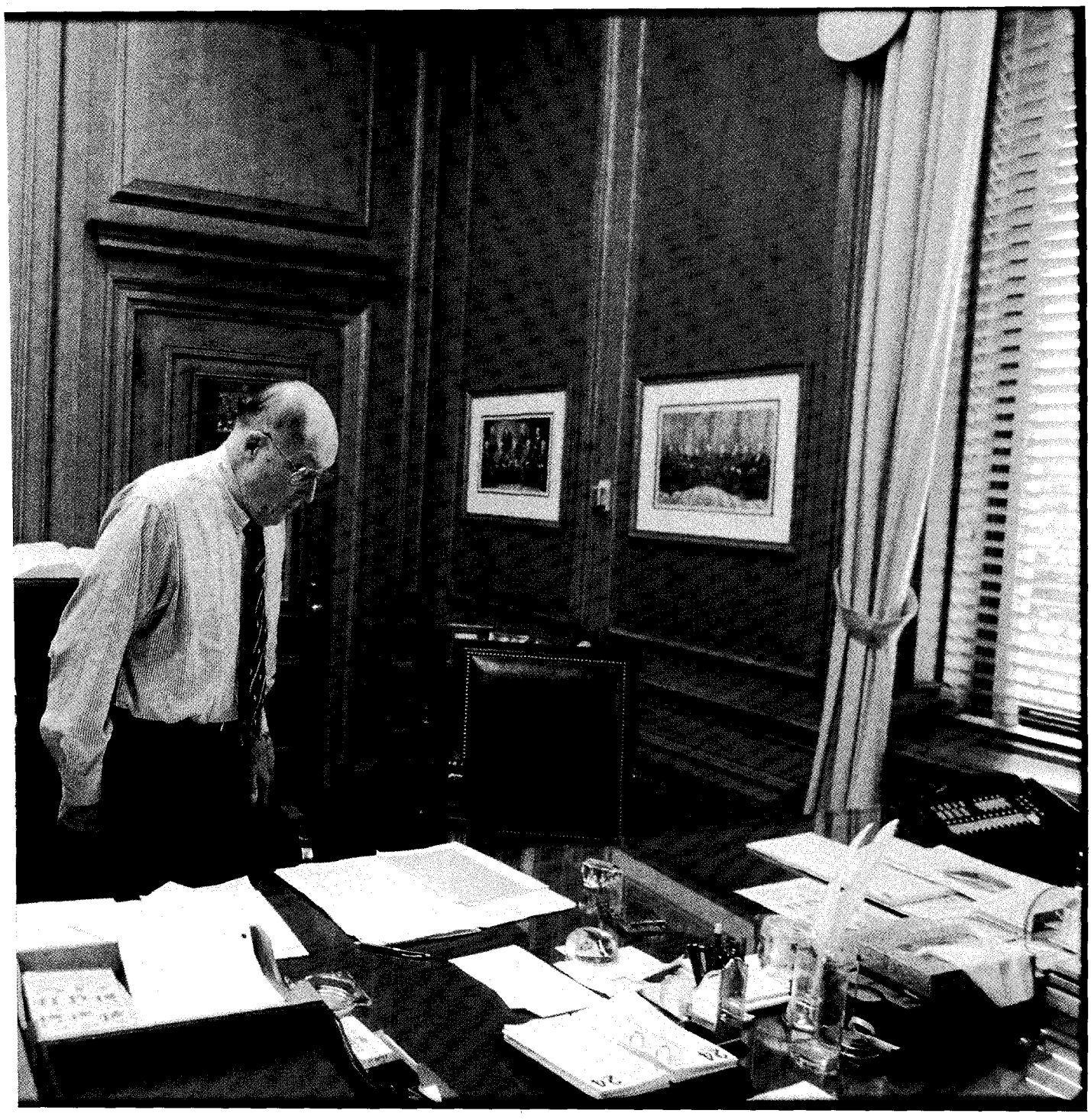

Rehnquist argued that because most of the justices had already made up their minds, a protracted colloquy would be a waste of time.

Rehnquist's courtroom style was similarly unvarying. He would cut lawyers off in mid-sentence when the red light on the bench began to flash, indicating that their allotted time had expired. (Each side gets precisely thirty minutes.) Some lawyers grumbled about this rigidity, but Rehnquist's clockwork discipline looked appealing in retrospect when Justice John Paul Stevens, who has presided in the chief justice's place during his battle with thyroid cancer, recently let one advocate have extra time and was then compelled to grant an extension to his opponent as well.

The two chief justices Rehnquist most admired, John Marshall and Charles Evans Hughes, were both politicians who had a knack for bringing together unlike-minded colleagues: Marshall, who served from 1801 to 1835, had been a Virginia congressman and secretary of state; Hughes, who served from 1930 to 1941, had been the governor of New York, a Republican candidate for president, and secretary of state. As Rehnquist told the C-SPAN interviewer Brian Lamb in a *Booknotes* appearance in 1993, Marshall had "an ability



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to get along with other people and persuade them that stood him in good stead when he was chief justice." And in a 1976 article in the *Hastings Constitutional Law Quarterly*, "Chief Justices I Never Knew," Rehnquist wrote that he especially admired Hughes's businesslike conduct of his private conferences, which lasted only six hours as opposed to the two or three days under Hughes's successor, Harlan Fiske Stone. Rehnquist concluded that "Hughes's superiority to Stone in presiding over the conference has a definite connection to their different amount of exposure to active political life."

Rehnquist's own political sensibility and experience were similarly central to his stewardship of the Court. By temperament and training he represented an older and what has come to be seen as milder strain of conservatism, rooted in the Goldwater wing of the Republican Party. Having cut his political teeth in Arizona in the heyday of Goldwaterism, he came to the Court with a far less angry and embattled attitude toward American democracy than younger conservatives like Scalia and Thomas. And unlike Scalia and Thomas, Rehnquist was never invested in fighting the culture wars from the bench, because of his overriding commitment to majority rule regardless of what the majority decides.

**Unlike Scalia and Thomas, Rehnquist was never invested in fighting the culture wars from the bench, because of his overriding commitment to majority rule—regardless of what the majority decides.**

If judicial activism is defined by a judge's willingness to strike down federal or state laws, then Scalia and Thomas are among the most activist justices on the Court today, surpassed only by Anthony Kennedy and, perhaps surprisingly, Sandra Day O'Connor. In contrast, Rehnquist is tied with Stephen Breyer for the role of second most restrained justice, after Ruth Bader Ginsburg. And while all the conservatives on the Rehnquist Court say for public consumption that the judiciary should occupy a modest role in American politics and should defer to the judgment of elected legislators, Rehnquist has most consistently practiced what he preaches.

"I'm a strong believer in pluralism," Rehnquist told *The New York Times Magazine* in 1985, the year before he was appointed chief justice. "Don't concentrate all the power in one place ... You don't want all the power in the Government as opposed to the people. You don't want all the power in the Federal Government as opposed to the states." When pressed about the source of these views, he joked, "It may have something to do with my childhood."

Rehnquist's Robert Taft–style conservatism—his faith in local majorities and his suspicion of broad federal power—does indeed reflect his midwestern upbringing. Born in 1924, he was raised, along with his sister, Jean, in Shorewood, Wisconsin, an affluent Milwaukee suburb known during the Depression for its Republicanism. Rehnquist's father, the son of Swedish immigrants, was an enthusiastic Republican who had never attended college and made his living selling paper wholesale. His mother, who had majored in French at the University of Wisconsin, was fluent in five foreign languages and worked as a translator for local export businesses.

Rehnquist's early years were suffused with old-fashioned patriotism. He enthusiastically supported U.S. intervention in World War II, and in 1941 he participated in a reenactment of America's founding called United States of Young Americans. That strong strain of patriotism has been an essential part of his makeup throughout his judicial career. In 1989, when Justices Scalia and Kennedy, both First Amendment libertarians, reluctantly voted to strike down a ban on flag-burning, Rehnquist produced an emotional dissenting opinion quoting John Greenleaf Whittier's Civil War poem "Barbara Frietchie": "'Shoot, if you must, this old gray head, / But spare your country's flag,' she said." It was one of the most personally revealing dissents he ever wrote.

Rehnquist won a scholarship to Kenyon College, in Ohio, but dropped out after one quarter, having found the atmosphere intellectually frivolous. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps and spent three years as a weather observer, ending up in Morocco and Egypt (where he was photographed on horseback in front of the Sphinx). Reluctant to return to the cold Milwaukee winters ("I wanted to find someplace like North Africa to go to school"), he enrolled on the GI Bill at Stanford, where he majored in political science.

While he was in the Army Air Corps, Rehnquist encountered a book that would be crucial to the development of his judicial philosophy: Friedrich A. Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*. "This book was an advocacy book trying to show that state planning and socialism and that sort of thing didn't work economically and were dangerous politically," Rehnquist told Brian Lamb in a later *Booknotes* interview. "It made quite an impression on me."

Rehnquist graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Stanford in 1948 with a bachelor's and a master's degree, and then got a second master's degree in political science from Harvard, in the hopes of becoming a professor of government. While at Harvard he started a thesis about the conservative British political philosopher Michael Oakeshott, whose insistence on the importance of continuity and tradition for social stability resonated strongly with Rehnquist. Oakeshott, like Hayek, called into question the centrally planned welfare state, as part of a larger warning against the concentration of power in the hands of government. But Oakeshott



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resisted Hayek's effort to construct a rigid libertarian ideology as the answer to collectivism; he argued that the best way to protect limited government was with a pragmatically conservative approach to politics, rather than with abstract theories about the true nature of the state.

"The chief's conservatism seems to reflect Oakeshott more than libertarians like Hayek," observes Richard Garnett, a former clerk who now teaches law at Notre Dame, and with whom Rehnquist discussed his admiration for Oakeshott. "It's not always about swashbuckling ideological adherence to first principles. It's also about temperament and disposition, about an attachment to traditions and institutions, and about stability and regularity."

After Harvard, Rehnquist attended Stanford Law School and graduated in 1952 at the top of an impressive class that included Sandra Day O'Connor. Based on his stellar academic record and genial personality, he won a clerkship with Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson, who had been Franklin Roosevelt's attorney general and was committed to the principle of judicial deference to legislatures. During his clerkship, which began in 1952, Rehnquist wrote two highly controversial memos to Jackson that would provoke firestorms during his own confirmation hearings, in 1971 and 1986. In the memos Rehnquist seemed to urge Jackson to dissent in two historic civil-rights cases: *Brown* v. *Board of Education*, which would strike down school segregation, and *Terry* v. *Adams*, which would block efforts to exclude blacks from the pre-primary selection of Texas Democrats. Rehnquist claimed during the hearings that he was expressing these views at Jackson's request—an assertion disputed by Jackson's secretary. Several legal scholars believe that Rehnquist probably lied in denying that the views were his. He appears to have been the only Supreme Court clerk during the 1952 term who supported *Plessy* v. *Ferguson*—this at a time when the country as a whole was evenly split over desegregation. Whether he was speaking for himself or for Jackson, the central position that Rehnquist laid out in the memos—stressing the importance of judicial deference to the majority will—succinctly summarized what would become his judicial philosophy throughout his career.

In the *Brown* memo Rehnquist wrote that the Supreme Court was ideally suited to mediate disputes between the states and the federal government or between branches of the federal government. In contrast, he said, "where a legislature [is] dealing with its own citizens, it [is] not part of the judicial function to thwart public opinion except in extreme cases." *Brown* was not one of those cases, Rehnquist argued, because "in the long run it is the majority who will determine what the constitutional rights of the minority are." Similarly, in *Terry* v. *Adams*, Rehnquist insisted that "the Constitution does not prevent the majority from banding together, nor does it attaint success in the effort. It is about time that the Court faced the fact that white people in the South don't like the colored people."

As jarring as these memos appear now, they are consistent with the views of many political scientists today, who argue that the Court, except in rare cases, neither can nor should thwart the will of a determined national majority, and that it invites political backlash when it attempts to do so. After Rehnquist joined the Court, he was asked whether justices are able to isolate themselves from the pressures of public opinion. "My answer was that we are not able to

---

## TO THE FUTURE

I in completing
this poem
hope at least

to outlive the journey
from a notebook page
to the freedom of

one fair copy to be handed
to a friend and then
to other friends

one of whom may
see to it that
these words are

copied or left about so that
some person who knows nothing of
me who wrote them

may notice and
take the poem as a
delight or disturbance.

May it enlist or
puzzle readers enough so
that by undertaking its traffic

they may speak its language to
multiply its effect
and by voicing both
deliver me to you.

—PETER DAVISON (1928–2004)

*Peter Davison was* The Atlantic's *poetry editor for thirty years.*



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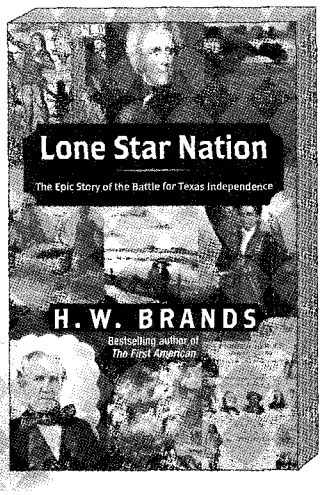


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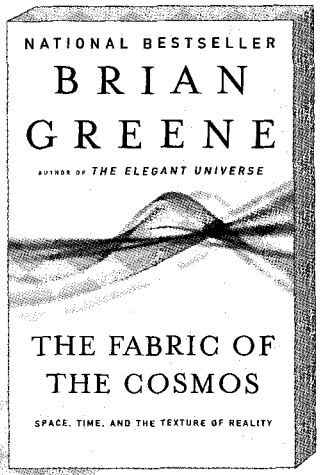


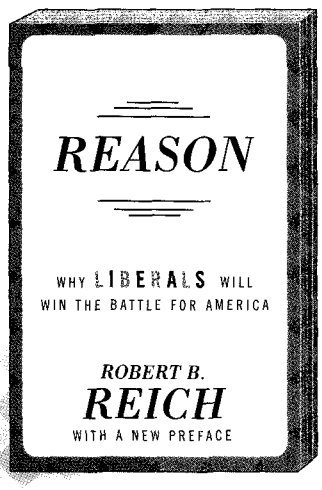


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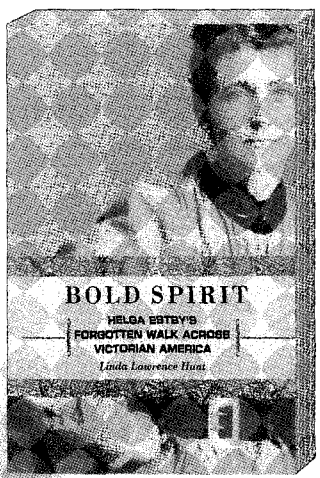


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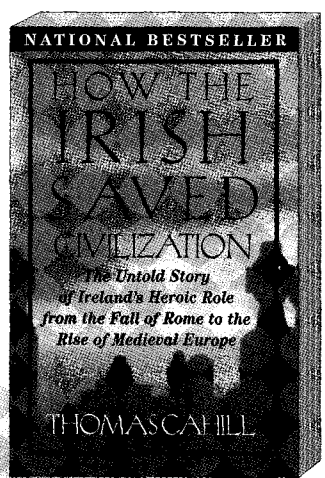


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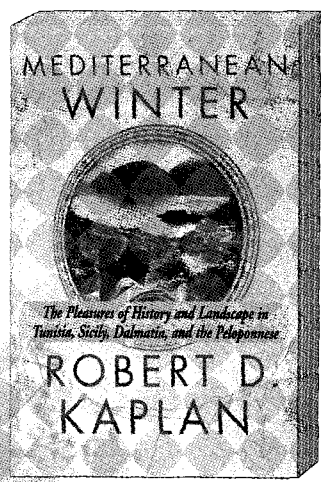


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do so, and it would probably be unwise to try," he recalled. Rehnquist's highly evolved pragmatism convinced him that the courts cannot ignore broad cultural shifts. This, as much as anything, distinguished Rehnquist from the later generation of judicial conservatives.

After his Supreme Court clerkship ended, in 1953, Rehnquist moved to Phoenix, always in search of warm weather and conservative politics. He joined a small law firm and became active in local Republican circles, which had been revitalized under the newly elected Senator Barry Goldwater. A decade later Rehnquist would write speeches for Goldwater's ill-fated 1964 presidential campaign, which united disparate parts of the conservative movement while alienating the liberal Rockefeller wing of the Republican

**When Nixon first met Rehnquist, who was given to the loud shirts and psychedelic ties of the era, he wondered aloud, "Who's the guy dressed like a clown?" Upon hearing his name, Nixon said, "Is he Jewish?"**

Party. His speeches for Goldwater singled out for attack the Warren Court's landmark decisions requiring school busing. But unlike the Dixiecrats, who fought to protect the power of local communities to enforce traditional values, Goldwater was no social conservative, as his later support for birth control and gay rights would attest; he was a populist who ardently opposed the excesses of federal, state, and local authority. Although Goldwater dutifully denounced the Warren Court's liberal obscenity and school-prayer decisions, he had little patience for his party's growing moralistic forces, which insisted that Christian virtue, rather than liberty, should be the Republicans' highest calling. The Republican Party of the 1960s, for all its associations with extremism at the time, seems in retrospect a less strident and more inclusive organization than the party of today.

In 1957, after the Warren Court issued a series of controversial decisions protecting the rights of suspected Communists, Rehnquist, then a young lawyer, wrote an article in *U.S. News & World Report* criticizing the law clerks he had known for their predominantly "'liberal' point of view," which he defined as "extreme solicitude for the claims of Communists and other criminal defendants, expansion of federal power at the expense of State power, great sympathy toward any government regulation of business—in short, the political philosophy now espoused by the Court under Chief Justice Earl Warren." Rehnquist also strongly disagreed with the Warren Court's prominent role in advancing the civil-rights movement. Testifying as a private citizen before the Phoenix City Council in 1964, he opposed a local public-accommodations law, charging later that it would summarily do away with "the historic right of the owner of a drug store, lunch counter, or theater to choose his own customers." That same year Rehnquist had urged Goldwater to vote against the Civil Rights Act. During his 1971 confirmation hearings Rehnquist said that he had changed his mind about public-accommodations laws, acknowledging that he hadn't understood how strongly minorities felt about protecting their rights.

Every political movement has its moral blind spots, and civil rights was certainly a moral blind spot for Goldwater Republicanism. Rehnquist's insistence on deferring to the will of the people is hard to reconcile with his indifference to the then emerging majority of Americans who supported upholding the rights of black people. Goldwater and Rehnquist were never white supremacists, like Strom Thurmond, of South Carolina, and James Eastland, of Mississippi, but they seemed unconcerned that their devotion to states' rights could lead to enshrining racism. (Justice Byron White, a Kennedy Democrat of the same generation who shared Rehnquist's devotion to majority rule, did not make the same mistake.)

Both Goldwater and Rehnquist came belatedly to recognize the error of their ways. Rehnquist ultimately embraced the Warren Court's *Brown* decision, and after he joined the Court he made no attempt to dismantle the civil-rights revolution, as political opponents feared he would. His change of position reflected not only his reverence for the Court as an institution but also his sense that once a majority has spoken, the decision has a legal force that must be obeyed. Compare Rehnquist's attitude on these points with that of Clarence Thomas, who refuses to accept decisions that he thinks are wrong. Even Scalia has been critical of Thomas for this; as he recently told Thomas's biographer, Ken Foskett, Thomas "does not believe in *stare decisis*, period." "If a constitutional line of authority is wrong, he would say let's get it right," Scalia continued. "I wouldn't do that."

When Richard Nixon was elected president in 1968, he appointed as deputy attorney general Richard Kleindeinst, a Phoenix lawyer who had worked on his campaign. Kleindeinst persuaded Attorney General John Mitchell to hire his friend Rehnquist. As head of the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel, which provides constitutional advice to the president, Rehnquist distinguished himself as a conservative intellectual and an enthusiastic defender of executive power in the face of widespread social unrest. The country, Rehnquist said in a Kiwanis Club speech in 1969, had to devote all its energies to countering "the danger posed by the new barbarians." Two years later he staunchly defended the mass arrest of Vietnam protesters. That year, with Justices Hugo Black and John Marshall Harlan retiring, Nixon considered some



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three dozen candidates to fill the two vacancies, including Vice President Spiro Agnew and Senator Howard Baker, of Tennessee. In an entertaining memoir, *The Rehnquist Choice*, John Dean, who was the White House counsel at the time and was later instrumental in Nixon's downfall, claims the credit (and also the blame) for being first to float the name of Rehnquist, who then was in charge of screening the other Supreme Court candidates. When Nixon first met Rehnquist, who was given to the loud shirts and psychedelic ties of the era, he wondered aloud, "Who's the guy dressed like a clown?" Upon hearing Rehnquist's name, Nixon said, "Is he Jewish? He looks it." But when the other candidacies fell by the wayside, the man Nixon was prone to call "Renchburg" won him over with his conservative credentials and unquestioned ability.

Rehnquist's first confirmation hearings focused on whether he had been truthful when he denied having challenged black and Hispanic voters as an Arizona poll watcher, and again in his account of one of his pro-segregation memos for Justice Jackson. Although Rehnquist was unanimously praised as an accomplished lawyer, he came under fire from a group of liberal Democrats on the Judiciary Committee, including Edward Kennedy, who charged that his record "reveals a dangerous hostility to the great principles of individual freedom under the Bill of Rights and equal justice for all people." Rehnquist was confirmed by a vote of 68 to 26.

As an associate justice, Rehnquist held fairly steadily to the views expressed in his *Brown* v. *Board of Education* memo of 1952. He almost invariably deferred to state legislatures on matters involving individual rights, and struck down federal laws only when he thought that Congress or the president had exceeded the bounds of constitutionally enumerated powers. The only cases in which Rehnquist was consistently willing to question federal power involved states' rights. During his first decade on the bench the most important states'-rights case for which Rehnquist wrote the majority opinion was *National League of Cities* v. *Usery*, in 1976; that case heralded the beginning of the so-called federalism revolution, which imposed meaningful limits on congressional power for the first time since the New Deal. In his opinion Rehnquist argued for limiting the federal government's ability to regulate the wages and hours of state and local government employees. The Tenth Amendment, he said, prevents Congress from acting in a way that "impairs the States' integrity or their ability to function effectively in a federal system." Although Rehnquist had mixed success maintaining majorities for this principle in the 1970s and 1980s, by the 1990s he had found at least four reliable allies—Scalia, Thomas, Kennedy, and O'Connor. But by not consistently deferring to Congress, Rehnquist failed to fulfill his oft-stated commitment to judicial restraint; under his leadership the Court indulged in an overconfident rhetoric of judicial supremacy and struck down thirty federal laws in one seven-year period—a higher rate than in any other Court in history.

In most cases, however, Rehnquist voted to uphold federal and state laws. When I re-read his youthful and often solitary dissents, which earned him the nickname "the Lone Ranger," it was hard not to be impressed by their energy, lack of pretense, and lack of anger. "The 1970s dissents were magnificent," says Jack Goldsmith, a constitutional scholar at Harvard Law School. "Rehnquist didn't have an overarching substantive theory of constitutional interpretation, but he was always respectful of the Court as an institution, even when he thought it was off the tracks."

Despite his conservative temperament, Rehnquist was never unduly preoccupied with following judicial precedents. In a biting critique published in *The New Republic* in 1982, Charles Krauthammer, the conservative essayist, and Owen Fiss, a liberal scholar at Yale Law School, charged that Rehnquist "repudiates precedents frequently and openly, and if that is impossible (because the precedent represents a tradition that neither the Court nor society is prepared to abandon), then he distorts them." Perhaps one answer to this criticism is that Rehnquist was always focused on moving the law in a fundamentally conservative direction while trying to circumvent any potential roadblocks along the way. His clerks, past and present, report that he would simply remove the reasoning from opinions if it got in the way of the result.

"He took each case as it came," recalls Michael K. Young, a former clerk who is now president of the University of Utah. "He thought that the Constitution was not designed to shape all of our behavior but to box in elected officials at the margins ... He didn't see the sky falling, the way Scalia sometimes does, and if you read his dissents, they're often pragmatic. I've never been able to figure out *Bush* v. *Gore*, but in general he just deferred to the political process."

But even Rehnquist's highly controversial vote to stop the manual recount in Florida in the 2000 presidential election may be an expression of his pragmatism, for better or worse. In a speech to a Catholic service organization soon after the election, Rehnquist defended the participation of Supreme Court justices in deciding the presidential election of 1876 and seemed to be justifying *Bush* v. *Gore* in similarly practical terms. "There is a national crisis, and only you can avert it," he said. "It may be very hard to say no."

Typical of Rehnquist's early opinions was his 1973 dissent from *Roe* v. *Wade*. Without huffing and puffing or personal invective, Rehnquist made a straightforward but powerful case for majority rule. "The fact that a majority of the States, reflecting, after all, the majority sentiment in those States, have had restrictions on abortion for at least a century is a strong indication, it seems to me, that the asserted right to an abortion is not [deeply rooted in tradition]," Rehnquist observed. It's striking to



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compare his even-tempered dissent with Scalia's wrathful and apocalyptic one nearly twenty years later. In *Planned Parenthood* v. *Casey*, the case that reaffirmed *Roe* v. *Wade*, Scalia equated abortion with slavery—both of them issues "involving life and death, freedom and subjugation"—and predicted that the Court would detonate a culture war in the same way that its *Dred Scott* decision, in 1857, precipitated the Civil War.

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**RESIN**

The needled air of the lodgepole.
Sting of pine at the base of your throat.
"A cold snap," he says. "Coming on."

Believing wasn't always hard.
The river forked in three: I knew
truth could go in different ways.

Corn was ripe when the tassels turned.
Late. Later still potatoes to be dug—
how far out, and how deep down,

I knew. Could slant the shovel right.
I'd use my hands now, claw deep
to better cup them, one by one,

as they let go their hold on earth.
This is the soil that I am from.
Those mountains—there, the Swan,

the Mission Range, and west the Salish—
they all washed down to fill this place.
We gained by their diminishment.

The harvest's passed to other hands.
The house is sold. The sap's curling
deep into the pines. "The weather's

turned," he says. I work the pump;
I try to slough the dirt stains off.
"Predictable as an Indian."

—GERI DORAN

*Geri Doran works for the Djerassi Resident Artists Program, in Woodside, California. Her forthcoming collection of poems,* Resin, *received the 2004 Walt Whitman Award.*

Rehnquist's moderate religious views (he is a Lutheran, although not a conspicuously observant one) may have contributed to his relative equanimity about abortion and prayer. "If I were a betting man, I would say personally Rehnquist thinks prayer in schools is pretty silly," Michael Young says. "You won't find him as hysterical about abortion and prayer as born-again Christians, who view these decisions as substantively essential to the moral fiber of the country. Rehnquist is willing to have it decided either way by the legislatures. Scalia couches it in a concern about democratic decisions, but that's not why Scalia cares."

Rehnquist reads broadly and avidly but, unlike Scalia, never comes off as a know-it-all and has never tried to lord his intelligence over his colleagues. While Scalia rails against popular culture, Rehnquist loves to rent movies—both new and old—and also goes to movie theaters by himself to see them. (His wife, Natalie, died in 1991 after a long struggle with ovarian cancer.) It is impossible to imagine him denouncing the Court for taking sides in the culture wars, as Scalia routinely does. "The Court must be living in another world," Scalia wrote in 1996. "Day by day, case by case, it is busy designing a Constitution for a country I do not recognize."

Temperament and religious sensibility may go a long way toward explaining differences of approach—between Rehnquist, on the one hand, and Scalia and Thomas, on the other. (It's worth noting that over the past ten years Rehnquist has voted more frequently with Kennedy and O'Connor than with Scalia and Thomas.) But another part of the explanation has to do with the reaction to *Roe* within the legal community itself. Because of *Roe*, a conservative judicial movement arose in the 1980s that was determined to curtail judicial discretion at all costs. *Roe* galvanized the religious right and unleashed far more conservative outrage against the Court than Earl Warren ever did. After he became president, Ronald Reagan, declaring that he wanted to avoid what he saw as Nixon's mistakes in picking moderate justices like Harry Blackmun, Warren Burger, and Lewis Powell, directed his Justice Department to find more-reliable ways of identifying doctrinaire strict constructionists. A turning point for this conservative judicial movement came in 1985, when Reagan's attorney general, Edwin Meese, delivered a speech to the American Bar Association denouncing the Burger Court for its "jurisprudence of idiosyncrasy." Meese asserted, "It has been and will continue to be the policy of this administration to press for a jurisprudence of Original Intention," which he defined as an "endeavor to resurrect the original meaning of constitutional provisions and statutes as the only reliable guide for judgment."

Although Rehnquist's opinions referred intermittently to this doctrine of "originalism" (most notably in cases involving the separation of church and state), he invoked constitutional history when it was convenient and otherwise ignored it. From the moment that Scalia and Thomas joined



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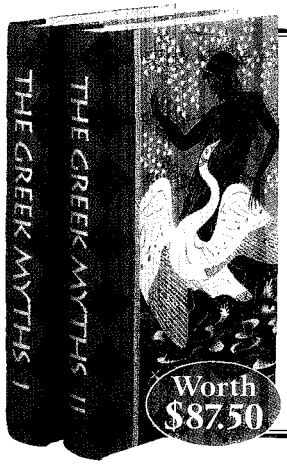


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the Court, in 1986 and 1991, respectively, they took a very different approach. Embracing the new orthodoxy with almost catechistic devotion, they insisted on the importance of construing each constitutional provision according to the presumed intentions of the Framers, no matter how disruptive or radical the consequences might be. For example, in 2003 Rehnquist wrote a majority opinion holding that Congress could allow state-government employees to sue their states for violating the Family and Medical Leave Act; Scalia and Thomas argued that this violated states' rights. "Scalia and Thomas embrace top-down theories of originalism and textualism as a principled way to control judicial discretion," Jack Goldsmith, of Harvard Law School, says. "Rehnquist is in a different, older, more pragmatic conservative tradition. He is less theoretical, often looks beyond text and history in discovering the relevant legal intentions, is more deferential to the political branches, and doesn't attempt to impose a general methodology across the board."

The gulf between Rehnquist and the Scalia-Thomas axis only widened this term and last. In *U.S.* v. *Booker*, decided in January, and *Blakeley* v. *Washington*, decided last spring, Scalia and Thomas joined three liberals on the Court in voting to strike down federal and state sentencing guidelines and in attempting to impose a sweeping new requirement that would have compelled juries to vote on each fact used to increase a sentence. Rehnquist, in contrast,

**Rehnquist's successes as chief justice provide an object lesson for future holders of the office: having a judicious temperament is far more important than having a consistent judicial methodology.**

sided with the more pragmatically minded justices—Breyer, O'Connor, and Kennedy—in upholding the sentencing guidelines, and avoided chaos by making the federal guidelines advisory rather than mandatory. Along the same lines, in an important terrorism case Rehnquist joined O'Connor in voting to allow the president to detain enemy combatants, but with a modest degree of judicial oversight. Meanwhile, Scalia and Thomas, in dissent, took rigid (and, as it happened, diametrically opposed) positions: Scalia argued that the president had no power to detain without congressional authorization, whereas Thomas contended that the president could do whatever he liked, without judicial or congressional oversight. Rehnquist will always take half a loaf over no loaf at all, and as chief justice he has proved far more willing than most of his colleagues to support, for the good of the Court, opinions with which he disagrees.

Rehnquist's successes as chief justice provide an object lesson for future holders of the office: having a judicious temperament is far more important than having a consistent judicial methodology. Rehnquist has always understood the political demands of whatever role he is asked to play, and was careful not to transgress its boundaries. His performance in presiding over the impeachment trial of President Clinton was masterly because he refused to pontificate, confining his interventions to rulings on procedural motions, which he handed down with confidence and skill. Had he played his part in a more intrusive or polarizing way, the trial might have turned into a political circus. (As a gesture of thanks, the majority and minority leaders of the Senate gave him a ceremonial cup.) By refusing as chief justice to give interviews except about his books on Supreme Court history, and by devoutly guarding his privacy, he has helped maintain and enhance the Court's carefully cultivated aura of mystery and authority.

The younger generation of justices, both conservative and liberal, have a dramatically different attitude toward questions of personal exposure. Clarence Thomas, for example, is far more accessible and emotionally revealing; he frequently gives speeches to groups of African-American students, in which he talks, in raw and intimate detail, about his childhood, his sense of inadequacy, and his abiding anger toward the civil-rights establishment. It is impossible to imagine the intensely private Rehnquist selling a memoir for $1.5 million, as Thomas recently did. But we are living in an age of celebrity that is ravenous for personal disclosure, and pressures on the justices to accede to these demands will only grow more insistent. It may not be long before we see them turning up on the morning talk shows, as O'Connor has done, to promote themselves and discuss their feelings.

"I've always admired Robert E. Lee for his refusal to write his memoirs," Rehnquist told Brian Lamb. "If memoirs are going to be interesting, if they're not going to be saccharine, you have to say some people didn't measure up and others did ... I think of a memoir as saying, 'When I came on the Court there were eight other justices and three or four were quite smart, but a couple of the others were creepy.' I don't want to get into that."

If the next chief justice turns out to be, as many Court watchers fear, less of a pragmatist and more of a rigid ideologue than Rehnquist, he or she may well end up dividing the Court that Rehnquist unified, and squandering its carefully constructed reserves of public trust. In that case Rehnquist's faith in majority rule, and his ability to resist the public's insistence that officeholders bare themselves in the spotlight, may seem like the scruples of a forgotten era. He may be the last of the old-fashioned judicial conservatives, who already look far more judicious than the conservatives who have arisen in their wake. And liberals may find themselves missing Rehnquist more than they could ever have imagined.



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# AMERICA'S AFRICAN RIFLES

*"Every time you fire, a bad guy should bleed!" At the heart of the U.S. military's imperial venture is the training of indigenous troops around the world—and at the heart of that training is the rifle range. A report from Niger*

BY ROBERT D. KAPLAN

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Early last summer the United States dismantled the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq, sending home L. Paul Bremer III, effectively its proconsul, and causing some observers to proclaim the end of the American empire. But imperialism has always been less about proconsuls than about local alliances and the training of indigenous troops, both of which allow the imperial authority to project power with minimum risk and fanfare. This was true for Rome, and it was particularly true for France and Britain, two thirds of whose campaigns consisted of soldiers enlisted in their colonies.

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Today it is also true for the United States—and not only in places that dominate media attention, such as Iraq and Afghanistan. The United States is training troops around the world, in Latin America and Asia and Africa. To witness it firsthand I recently traveled to the Niger River region of the Sahel, a belt of savannah and scrub on the Sahara's southern edge that has of late become an important focus for American interests.

The countries of the Sahel—which runs through Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, and Sudan—are among the world's poorest and most unstable, with some of the highest fertility and lowest quality of life anywhere. Governments have little control beyond their capital cities, and throughout the region are many of the ingredients that breed terrorists and their sympathizers: a population disillusioned with its political leadership; a dangerously high number of unemployed young men; Islamic orthodoxy on the rise. Sahelian Africa provides the two conditions essential for penetration by al-Qaeda and its offshoots: weak institutions and the cultural access afforded by an Islamic setting. It is, in fact, already home to what is arguably the most dangerous and dynamic Islamic force in the northern half of Africa today: the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat.

Big Oil, too, has lured the United States to the region: America already imports some 15 percent of its oil from West Africa—a figure expected to rise to 25 percent within a decade. Also of concern are the Chinese, who have been investing heavily in the region and whose influence the United States wants to limit.

Given these circumstances, the U.S. European Command (EUCOM)—which is based in Stuttgart, Germany, and oversees most of Africa beyond the Horn—set in motion the Pan-Sahel Initiative, designed as an economy-of-force measure to avert the need for a massive deployment against terrorists like that in Afghanistan. As part of the initiative the United States has already dispatched Army Special Forces to Mali and Mauritania, and Marines to Chad and Niger—and those troops have not been idle. In 2003 and 2004, for example, after the Salafists had amassed weapons and vehicles in Mali for use in Algeria, Navy surveillance aircraft helped push the group out of Mali and into Niger and Chad, where U.S. military planners advised Chadian troops, who killed or captured more than forty insurgents. A follow-up program, called the Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Initiative, has received initial funding.

I met up with the Marines in Niger, the second poorest country in the world after Sierra Leone. Niamey, Niger's capital, unrolls along the Niger River's northern bank and is little more than a sprawling village; compared with the teeming slum cities to the south, such as Lagos and Abidjan, it is conspicuously clean and possesses the affecting, sensual intimacy of a small African city that has yet to experience a great wave of urban migration. But the city works better as a place to live than as the administrative center of a vast and unstable country. Niger's border with Libya, to the northeast, is farther from Niamey

*Robert D. Kaplan, an Atlantic correspondent, is the author of* Imperial Grunts: The American Military on the Ground, *forthcoming in August. It is the first of several books he is writing about the military.*



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than the Great Lakes are from the Gulf of Mexico—and the country's governing elite, composed mainly of ethnic Hausas and Songhai-Djermas, has to control not only the 12 million people living in the sliver of territory that stretches east from Niamey along the Benin and Nigerian borders but also the often hostile population of the country's desert regions, which extend to Mali, Algeria, Libya, and Chad, and where recent violence has fueled fears that Tuareg tribesmen may try to relaunch their rebellion.

The U.S. military has the same daunting task here that it has in so many other places where it is deployed: to help make a "country" into something real, against considerable odds. I stress the military here with good reason: the State Department may constitute the official, public front for security-assistance missions, but it is the humanitarian-assistance projects, administered by EUCOM through a defense attaché at the U.S. embassy, that on the ground provide for almost all the charity relief by America to the wild and troubled north of Niger—a region where few NGOs have been able to penetrate until recently. In any case, no presence can be established in the north without the help of the Nigerien military, with which civilian aid workers have cultivated little contact. In a weak democracy like Niger's, politicians come and go but soldiers and security men remain, as silent, behind-the-scenes props—that is, if they haven't metamorphosed into politicians themselves. Niger's civilian head of state, Mamadou Tandja, is a former army lieutenant colonel.

**"Aim for the high center torso," Sergeant Rivera yelled at the Nigeriens. "Any hit is good. Don't worry about carving up the bull's-eye. This isn't target shooting. This is about fighting with a gun."**

When I left Niamey, it was in a white Toyota pickup driven by Major Paul Baker, of Drummond, Oklahoma. We were headed for the Nigerien military base of Tondibiah, fifteen minutes from Niamey, where the Marines had their barracks—or hootch, as it is often called. Major Baker was the commanding officer of a Marine training team that consisted of twenty-four men (including three Navy corpsmen) drawn from Camp Lejeune, North Carolina; Norfolk, Virginia; and EUCOM's Stuttgart headquarters. He wore wire-rimmed glasses, had a graying-blond high-and-tight haircut, and bore a frank, uncomplicated expression on his face. At forty, he was a bit long in the tooth for his rank—but so were some of his lieutenants, he told me. They had started out as enlisted men and later went to Officer Candidate School at Quantico, Virginia. It was a good platoon, because the officers had been grunts themselves.

After we entered Tondibiah, we saw millet fields and the occasional street urchin. But Baker said, "It's a dramatic improvement over Chad, where whole villages existed within the army bases." Having just come from a two-month training mission in Chad, Baker was struck after a week of his present mission by the stark differences between the two countries. On paper Chad was marginally better off than Niger, and I thought it might have boasted a flinty army, given its three decades of civil war. But the Marines had found Chad less developed, and not up to Niger in the quality of its military.

The Marine hootch was a one-story cement structure with a corrugated-iron roof, protected only by concertina wire. An American flag waved near a small barbecue grill. Mosquito nets covered the racks (what naval forces call bunks), and big fat lizards climbed all over the walls and did pushups in the dirt. It was 110° under a bleached iron sky. A fan whirred loudly. The place felt laid-back—unlike the Special Forces bases I had visited in Colombia, where car bombs and makeshift mortar attacks were a fact of daily life. Here there was no atmosphere of paranoia, no vast array of weapons, no high sandbagged walls. Here the Marines traveled stripped down, like backpackers. I felt as though we were in a fleabag hotel. But I had a sink that delivered cold water, a luxury I had never before experienced with the U.S. military.

Baker's men had just begun training three platoons' worth of host-country soldiers, individually selected by their commanders for talent and motivation. Nothing fancy here. The initial training cycle consisted of the fundamentals of good soldiery: shooting, land navigation, and basic medicine. Liberty demands authority; without minimal order there can be no freedom. If Niger's civilian government was going to survive and protect its borders against transnational terrorists, military professionalization was crucial—and it started in part with Baker's Marines.

I spent my first days at Tondibiah on the rifle range, watching Nigerien troops being trained by four Marines: Gunnery Sergeant Eric Coughlin, of Shohola, Pennsylvania; Staff Sergeant Stephen Long, of Irmo, South Carolina; Staff Sergeant Bobby Rivera, of the Bronx, New York; and Sergeant Chris Singley, of Milledgeville, Georgia. All were in their thirties except Singley, who was twenty-five.

I have spent enough time with Marines around the world to know that these four had to be an impressive bunch. Noncoms are the heart and soul of the Marine Corps, which may have the most powered-down command structure of any Western military force. Battlefield expertise and leadership depend on sergeants' leading corporals, who in turn lead lance corporals. Without advanced training one doesn't get to be a sergeant—particularly a staff sergeant, who com-



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mands a platoon of two dozen men, or a gunnery sergeant, the exalted go-to guy in every unit. These Marines were experts: Coughlin was a specialist in military mountaineering, Long in marksmanship, and Singley in riverine operations. As for Rivera, he was a member of Force Recon—something of a Marine equivalent to the Navy SEALs and the Army's Delta Force. Rivera and Singley were on loan from the Special Operations Training Group, at Camp Lejeune. Because training Third World armies was for decades a Special Forces affair, the deployment to Chad and Niger constituted an opportunity for the Marines to show what they could do, and the Corps had therefore sent some of its best. (Indeed, a few months later Singley—the youngest and least experienced of the four—would be the senior adviser to an Iraqi army unit on the outskirts of Fallujah.)

It was dark and pouring rain at 6:00 A.M., when we set out for the range. First we halted at the Nigerien barracks to collect the trainees. When we arrived, twenty-three of them were standing in formation, singing a traditional morning melody for their commander. After they finished, they climbed in a silent, orderly manner into the backs of our pickups. A few minutes later, when we got to the firing range, they marched out onto the field and began setting up the targets; then they lined up single file, their field caps in their hands as the rain fell on their heads. After prying open the Chinese-made sardine cans of 7.62mm ammunition for the Nigeriens' AK-47s, Coughlin and the three other sergeants dumped the rounds into the trainees' field caps. "Wait till the end of the day," Long told me. "They'll actually pick up the brass cartridges on the field without being told to—and not to sell, either. They bring their own medical equipment to the range. The Chadians weren't like this." The Nigeriens, I noticed also, displayed real muzzle awareness: when not shooting they kept their rifles pointed at the ground, and never once dropped them in the dirt. The Filipino and Colombian soldiers I had observed hadn't been nearly as disciplined.

The Nigerien military had participated in messy, violent peacekeeping missions in Cote D'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Burundi, the Congo, and Haiti. It was a military that formed its own elite social class, with officers sending their young sons to cadet schools. Its soldiers had proved their willingness to die in defense of not only their own but also U.S. interests: on several occasions Nigerien units had hotly pursued Salafist extremists across the border into neighboring countries.

Waiting around, watching the host-country troops load their ammo into the magazines, I mentioned to Staff Sergeant Long that coups, being a feature of modernization, tend to happen when a military is more institutionally advanced than its civilian authority. Long, a stocky, red-haired thirty-two-year-old with piercing eyes, who had been tagged for me by Major Baker as one of the brightest Marines in the unit, broke in about the Filipino military and the inefficiency and corruption of successive civilian regimes in the Philippines. His insights were impressive. As Baker's remarks about Chad and Niger had shown, Marines suck up knowledge wherever they can. And because their personal experiences are so different from those of journalists and academics, their company is invigorating in an intellectual sense.

Dawn came, and for a time the rain held off the heat. I inserted my earplugs and joined the Americans and the Nigeriens as they walked out onto the 300-yard range. It was good to be on a rifle range again. In 2003 and early 2004 I had taken a crawl-walk-run approach to following the U.S. military. I observed Army Special Forces training host-country troops in Colombia and the Philippines, and then accompanied them on presence patrols and armed assaults in Afghanistan; I observed Marines in training and pulling



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guard duty in Djibouti, and then accompanied them during urban combat in Iraq. This approach required regularly going back to the basics, just as soldiers themselves always do; the circular monotony of military life is fundamental to any experience of it. When Special Forces and Marine battalions return from deployments overseas to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, or Camp Pendleton, California, they return to the rifle range. With the training of indigenous troops at the heart of imperialism, and the rifle range at the heart of such training in our era, the range is truly the center of it all.

"Every time you fire, a bad guy should bleed!" Sergeant Rivera yelled. "Aim for the high center torso. Any hit is good. Don't worry about carving up the bull's-eye. This isn't target shooting. It's about fighting with a gun." He spoke with a Bronx accent, his voice at once loud, grating, and intimate. Because Rivera was a specialist in weaponry and the related field of close-quarters combat, Coughlin—who, as Gunny, technically outranked him—deferred to him.

A Nigerien major, Moussa Salou Barmou, translated Rivera's commands into French and Hausa for his soldiers. Major Moussa had trained with the U.S. Army at Fort Benning, Georgia, and with the Ivorians, the Cameroonians, and the Pakistanis. "I didn't know what real combat was about until Fort Benning," he told me. "The Americans have the money to simulate war in training, unlike other armies. But I wish the Americans could see how the rebels settle in our border towns in the desert and marry local girls so that they become invisible, so that you don't know who you have to fight." Because Major Moussa outranked the Marine noncoms, each made sure to address him as "Sir."

Rivera went on. The Nigeriens were only fifteen yards out from the targets—paper silhouettes of soldiers aiming their guns. "You will all fire a controlled pair followed by a hammer," he explained. "A controlled pair is two slow shots. A hammer is two fast ones. Shooting a hammer, the rifle will recoil twice. You won't have time to readjust, meaning with a fucked-up body position you will miss the target at least once. And that"—he was now shouting—"is unacceptable!"

Rivera demonstrated, repeating and yelling everything, sometimes mixing English with French in his Bronx accent: "*En position. Levez la sécurité. Feu! Avancez.*" Meanwhile, Coughlin, Long, and Singley worked quietly with individual soldiers. Major Moussa did his part, in one case shoving his knee behind that of one of his soldiers to ease him into the correct body position. I remembered a young Filipino lieutenant who constantly had to be told by an American noncom to pay attention to his own troops. That wasn't necessary here.

Rivera now made them repeat the drill from twenty-five yards out, this time while changing magazines: "Don't bend down. Just let the magazine drop. Minimize your movements or you're gonna fucking die." He demonstrated shooting and changing magazines while closing the distance from twenty-five to fifteen yards. The impressive thing was what wasn't happening: there were no wasted movements. "Notice," he said, "I'm not fast. I'm just smooth. It's not about speed but about efficiency."

Later he taught them how to unjam their AK-47s while also changing magazines and closing the distance with the enemy. "This isn't target practice!" he kept shouting. "This is about killing people!" During the entire morning Rivera only once checked the targets to see how accurately the soldiers were shooting. As long as they were hitting the silhouettes or just the paper, he was happy. He wanted them to be comfortable handling a rifle on the move in combat. He knew from assaults on mud-walled compounds in Afghanistan during the first weeks of the U.S.-led invasion there, in 2001, that survival was less a matter of a perfect shot than of getting a spare magazine quickly out of a side pocket.

Rivera liked the fact that the targets were man-shaped silhouettes rather than concentric circles. "If you're aiming at a bull's-eye, you're being programmed to shoot paper. If you're aiming at a silhouette, you're being programmed to kill motherfuckers."

"Standing is the most unstable platform for firing a rifle," he went on. "That's why fifty yards out is the farthest we will ever shoot standing up. At a hundred yards I'll drop to the prone in two seconds, but then I'll methodically put two in his chest so the motherfucker will die before he can find his iron sights. That way I'll live. And I wanna live, because back in America there are a lot of women that love me." Major Moussa translated, and his soldiers laughed loudly.

It was almost eleven. We had been on the range for four hours. The cordite had mixed with the rain to form a mist. "*Etes-vous fatigués comme des demoiselles?* [Are you tired like girls?]" Rivera shouted. Laughing hard, the Nigerien troops let out a resounding "*Non!*" Training continued for another hour, until the break for chow.

As we opened MREs (meals ready to eat), Rivera told me, "There ain't nothing I'd rather do than get shot at. But if I can't shoot or get shot at, just being on the range is heaven." His remark represented the essence of good morale. According to the military expert Edward Luttwak, soldiers and Marines complain all the time—but that doesn't mean morale is bad. Luttwak would be suspicious if they didn't complain. Bad morale is when troops have lost their spirit to fight.

By now the rain had stopped and the temperature was back over 100°. Training resumed for two more hours. At the end, still shouting, Rivera warned, "*Ecoutez*—tomorrow we'll do the drills with more magazine changes, because you're still fucking up. Remember, you're not learning how to shoot, but how to fight when you're tired and dirty. When you're tired and dirty and hurting, I want you to reach down and grab your balls. To find out what you're made of!"

Everybody laughed. This wasn't about being mature or sensitive. This was about motivating young African soldiers. And when each one of the Nigeriens walked over to the charismatic Rivera to shake his hand, it was clear that he knew how to do that.



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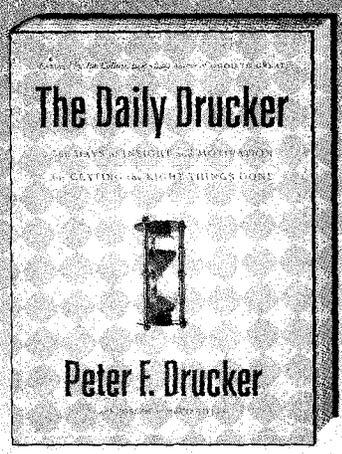


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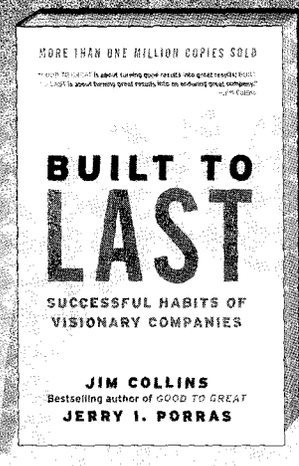


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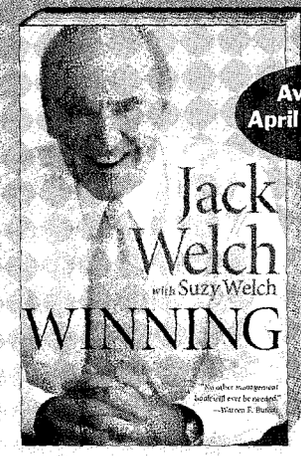


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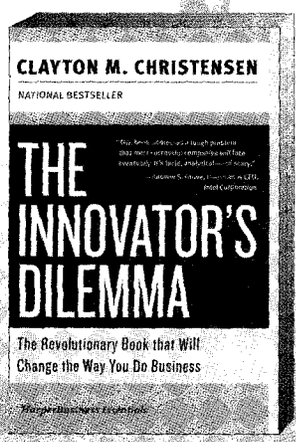


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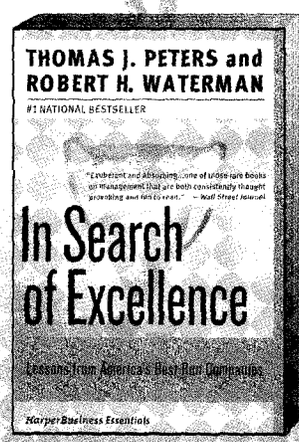


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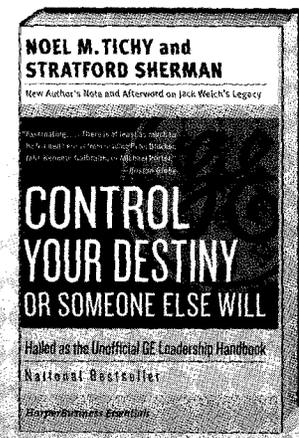


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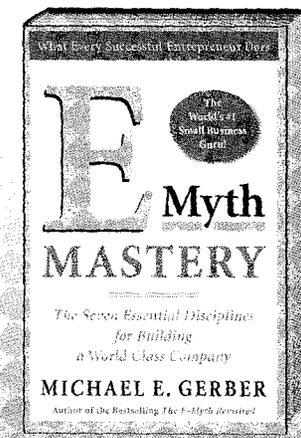


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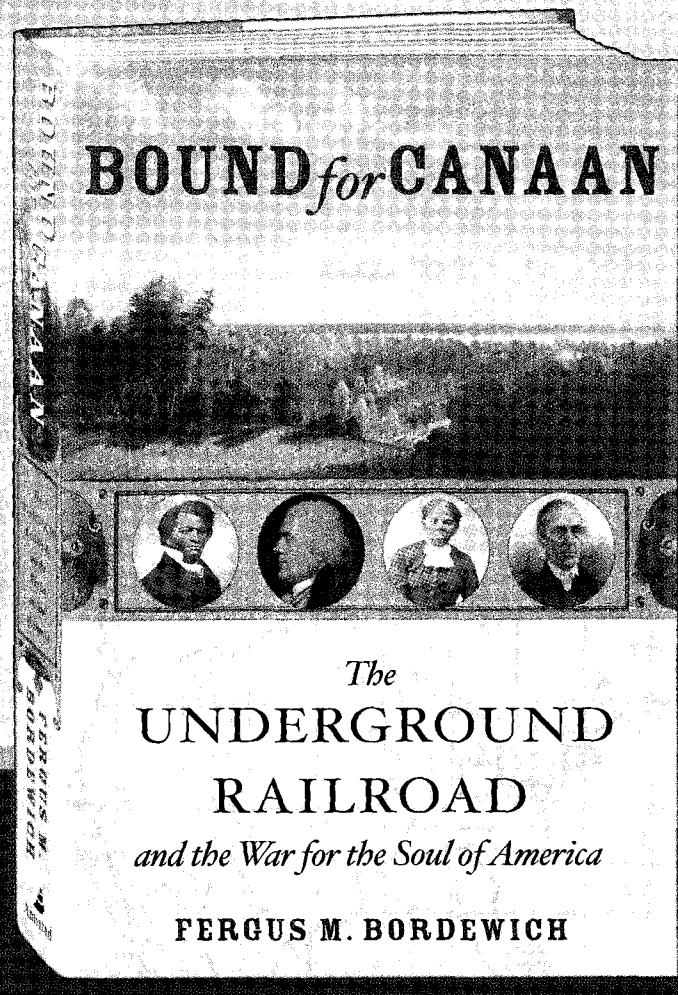


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REVIEWED THIS MONTH:

**Against the Beast**
edited by John Nichols
**War and the Iliad**
by Simone Weil and Rachel Bespaloff
**Understanding Dante**
by John A. Scott
*reviewed by Benjamin Schwarz*
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**Don't Think of an Elephant!**
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**What's the Matter With Kansas?**
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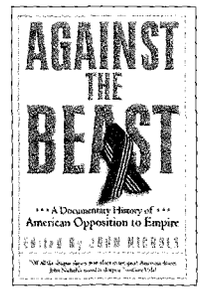
EDITOR'S CHOICE

# The Lost Crusade

*What to read this month—and what not to*

BY BENJAMIN SCHWARZ

"Empire" is once again a fashionable term of opprobrium deployed by domestic opponents of American foreign policy. This compendium of anti-imperialist expression from the Founders to the present is often illuminating but, frustratingly, obscures as much as it elucidates. John Nichols, *The Nation*'s Washington correspondent, admires the late William Appleman Williams, that insightful if often gaseous New Left diplomatic historian, who always urged those on the left to learn from conservatives. So, appropriately enough, the selections here are in many ways ecumenical. The book will reveal to all too many progressive critics of the Bush administration that Eugene Debs, Senator Burton "Bolshevik Burt" Wheeler, and Gore Vidal share a foreign-policy tradition with such conservatives as Senator Robert "Mr. Republican" Taft and Pat Buchanan. That tradition has emphasized the limits of America's power; been wary of a universalist conception of U.S. security interests; warned against excessive presidential power, secrecy, and deception in foreign policy; and held that democracy can't be imposed by war, that the United States cannot and should not remake the world in its image, and that, to quote John Quincy Adams, America "goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy." (George Will, whose conservatism is getting the better of his party loyalty, seems increasingly to be embracing this tradition.) Indeed, a reader of much of this book would draw the same conclusion as Carl Oglesby, the president of Students for a Democratic Society, who said during the Vietnam War that "the old Right and the New Left are morally and politically coordinate" (alas, not quoted by Nichols). But unlike Will, Nichols too often lets his political prejudices get the better of his professed non-interventionism—and in so doing shirks his editorial responsibilities. Hence we're treated to the less than penetrating sloganeering of Tim Robbins and Patti Smith regarding the war in Iraq; but in a chapter devoted to post–Cold War foreign policy Nichols skips from opposition to the first President Bush's adventures in the Gulf to opposition to the second's. Missing is any criticism of the foreign policies conducted during the eight-year Democratic interregnum. Those




**AGAINST THE BEAST**
*edited by John Nichols*
Nation Books



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policies may have been wise or foolish, but they included NATO enlargement, which was the most ambitious and far-reaching expansion of the American "empire" since the beginning of the Cold War. They also included a war—justified by official arguments that were at best exaggerated and misleading—conducted absent congressional and UN authorization, against a Yugoslav regime that, while thuggish, presented no threat to the United States (and during which our British ally's commander protested to the future Democratic presidential candidate General Wesley Clark that the latter's tough-guy tactics threatened to "start World War III"). All these actions would appear to be, and indeed were, grist for the anti-imperial mill—but those protests are omitted here, which makes one wonder if some progressives' opposition to "empire" is determined less by principle than by politics. As an introduction to this foreign-policy tradition, then, I'd recommend instead the eccentric Bill Kauffman's *America First!* (1995), which is as much a cultural polemic as a political one. Perhaps the most valuable quotation Nichols includes is Vidal's historical corrective: "There is now a myth that the isolationists were pro-Hitler and anti-Semitic. This is nonsense. Practically every Socialist in the country, starting with Norman Thomas, was an isolationist." When supporters of the current administration hurl the I-word (a bipartisan slur: the Clinton administration also used it), thoughtful dissenters should quote Walter Lippmann (who, along with Charles Beard, goes surprisingly unnoted by Nichols). During the Vietnam War he urged America to "eschew the theory of a global and universal duty, which not only commits it to unending wars of intervention, but intoxicates its thinking with the illusion that it is a crusader for righteousness." Accused of neo-isolationism, Lippmann retorted, "Compared to people who thought they could run the universe, or at least the globe, I *am* a neo-isolationist and proud of it."

**War and the Iliad**, *by Simone Weil and Rachel Bespaloff* (New York Review Books). In the early months of the Second World War two brilliant and despairing Frenchwomen of Jewish background each wrote an essay on the *Iliad*. Weil's "The Iliad, or The Poem of Force" and Bespaloff's "On the Iliad" remain the twentieth century's most beloved, tortured, and profound responses to the world's greatest and most disturbing poem. Before the war ended, Mary McCarthy had translated both essays into English, and plans were soon made to publish them together in a book, but to no avail. Here, thanks to NYRB (one of the very few happy innovations in contemporary publishing), the two are finally between the same covers. This is an especially important service for Bespaloff's essay, which has never been as readily available as Weil's (a Quaker study center reprinted Weil's piece as a cheap pamphlet, in which form it was de rigueur in Vietnam-era Western Civ classes). Although Weil and Bespaloff explored some similar themes, the ardent Weil contrasts with the coolly Gallic Bespaloff; Weil highlights the poem's savage, pulsating energy and its violence, Bespaloff its "lucid tenderness and delicate precision," its comedy, and its celebration of Hector's civilized values and his futile attempts to protect life's "perishable joys," even as she assesses the stark Homeric world view, which "acknowledges a fall, but a fall that has no date and has been preceded by no state of innocence and will be followed by no redemption." But Bespaloff's triumph is undoubtedly her deeply sympathetic portrait of Helen, which she couples with a jaundiced appraisal of the passions that imprison her. (In a comparison of Helen and Anna Karenina, Bespaloff's judgments are epigrammatic: "They awake in exile and feel nothing but a dull disgust for the shriveled ecstasy that has outlived their hope.") As proper French intellectuals, both Weil and Bespaloff were rigorously trained in ancient Greek, but neither was a classical scholar. Their essays nevertheless were long prized as much by classicists as by writers and philosophers. Weil's piece, though, has recently been dented, which is consistent with a general revisionism regarding this—it must be acknowledged—difficult, self-centered, and somewhat self-important saint. To be sure, Weil's interpretation (famously encapsulated in the opening sentence—"The true hero, the true subject, the center of the *Iliad* is force") is reductive and in some ways anachronistic (the Second World War, of course, broods over her piece). But a number of academics, most notably Seth Schein (in his otherwise penetrating book *The Mortal Hero*), fault Weil, a pacifist, for failing "to recognize the nobility and glory of the slayers," and for thus slighting the allure of violence in the Homeric world. This misses a lot. In fact the tension between Weil's revulsion toward and attraction to violence informs, indeed propels, the essay (in her first paragraph she describes the implacable power of force in sexually submissive terms, and avers that for those perceptive enough to place violence at the center of human history, "the *Iliad* is the purest and the loveliest of mirrors"). Weil's essay is imperishable and unsettling precisely because, like Homer (whose similes poignantly juxtapose the brute aspects of battle and the tranquillity of domestic life), she recognized the seductive power of war's terrible beauty, and both the vicious ecstasy of subjugators and the suffering of their victims. Despite some academic carping, these essays (and Bernard Knox's masterly introduction to Robert Fagles's translation) are the key introductory critical works for general readers of the *Iliad*, but no one has done for Homer what John A. Scott has now done for Dante in **Understanding Dante** (Notre Dame). An Australian scholar, Scott is one of the world's leading Dantisti. In this summa of his career he has written a commanding, elegant overview of Dante's works, analyzing his historical context; his political, moral, and religious ideas; the structure and texture of his writing; and the state of Dante scholarship. Scott has accomplished the nearly impossible: he has married close interpretation with broad synthesis—and in clear, often vigorous prose. This is a significant and deeply satisfying book.

*Benjamin Schwarz is the literary editor and the national editor of* The Atlantic.



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BOOKS

# Thinking of Jackasses

*The grand delusions of the Democratic Party*

BY MARC COOPER

In one of Lenny Bruce's classic routines an agitated Lyndon Johnson—freshly seated in the White House, and in the privacy of the Oval Office—is sweatin', swearin', and cussin' as he tries to say "Ni-Ni-Ni ... Ni-groh" but instead keeps returning to a more familiar and vulgar word. Now, at the urging of the UC Berkeley cognitive linguist George Lakoff, liberal America's guru of the moment, progressive Democrats are practicing to get their own reluctant mouths around some magical new vocabulary, in the hope of surviving and eventually overcoming the age of Bush.

In his best-selling manual of progressive political advice, *Don't Think of an Elephant!*, Lakoff asserts that political consciousness, and therefore voter choice, is determined by deeply wired mental structures—"frames"—that reflect more-general views and values. "The frames," Lakoff writes, "are in the synapses of our brains, physically present in the form of neural circuitry." Notwithstanding this neuroscientific hooey, Lakoff suggests that reframing American politics according to liberal values—in essence rewiring our collective circuitry—is but a matter of simple wordplay. When conservatives invoke "strong defense," liberals, Lakoff says, must reframe the concept by referring to a "stronger America." Instead of "free markets," liberals should speak of "broad prosperity." Likewise, "smaller government" must be recast as "effective government," and "family values" as "mutual responsibility." Those greedy "trial lawyers" excoriated by the right should be reframed and praised as brave and selfless "public-protection attorneys." And perhaps most important, when conservatives start promoting more Bushian "tax relief," liberals should respond by defending taxes as "membership fees" or "investments" in America.

And here I thought semantic bobbing and weaving had helped cost the Democrats the vote. But what do I know? Just a few weeks after the November election House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (a veritable totem of blue-state liberalism) invited Lakoff to come in and coach the Democratic caucus in this new way of thinking. Other liberal members of Congress distributed hundreds of copies of his book to Hill staffers. Lakoff's slim volume has now had multiple printings,

STEVE BRODNER

and its small Vermont-based publisher predicts that half a million copies will eventually be sold. "What are there?" Margo Baldwin, of Lakoff's publishing house, said to the *Los Angeles Times* as she estimated the market. "Fifty million unhappy Democrats out there?"

Baldwin's off-the-cuff remark betrays the real reason for Lakoff's sudden popularity. Much more than an offering of serious political strategy, *Don't Think of an Elephant!* is a feel-good self-help book for a stratum of despairing liberals who *just can't believe* how their commonsense message has been misunderstood by the eternally deceived masses. Liberal values are American values, they say, but somehow Americans just keep getting tricked—by Fox News, Sinclair Broadcasting, AM talk radio, conservative think tanks—into thinking and voting against their own interests.

So what's an earnest, honest liberal to do when nobody wants to hear the truth? Why not turn to personal therapy disguised as politics, psychobabble as electoral strategy? Lakoff, revealingly, provides nary a word on reshaping the Democratic Party itself, blunting the influence of corporate cash, eliminating the stranglehold on the party and its candidates by discredited but omnipowerful consultants, reversing its estrangement from the white working class, finding some decent candidates, or just about anything else that might require actual strategic thinking, orga-



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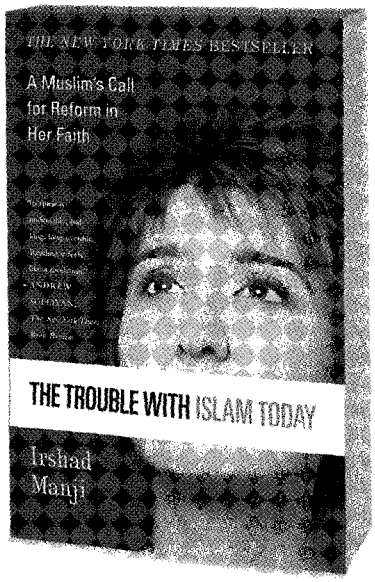


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nizing, and politicking. Never mind. What liberals most need to do, Lakoff says, is "be the change you want."

This is not to disparage as self-indulgent, latte-sipping navel-gazers and whiners the 48 percent of the electorate that voted Democratic. But Limbaugh-driven stereotypes aside, the Democratic liberal and activist crust does indeed seem ever more in denial about the depth of its defeat, about its detachment from what it claims as its "traditional base," and about its apparent willingness to pursue little more than a self-referential, self-indulgent political aesthetic. It's much easier nowadays to fancy yourself a member of a persecuted minority, bravely shielding the flickering flame of enlightenment from the increasing Christo-Republican darkness, than it is to figure out how you're actually going to win an election or, God forbid, organize a union.

Lakoff makes it simple to assume this smug, self-aggrandizing posture, arguing that "the two different views of the nation"—conservative versus progressive—reflect two basic kinds of American families. Those who vote conservative, he says, are proponents of authoritarian "strict-father families," which emphasize self-interest, greed, and competitiveness. These are families that "are against nurturance and care," favor corporal punishment, and have a propensity to follow the teachings of the Christian-right ideologue James Dobson. Progressives, meanwhile, reflect a "gender-neutral [and] nurturant parent model," which values "freedom," "opportunity," and "community building," and which protects its children against crime, drugs, "cars without seat belts," smoking, and "poisonous additives in food," while adhering to the teachings of the Dali Lama. Yes, there are many conflicted people in the middle, the so-called "biconceptuals," who are a meld of the two family types, Lakoff says. And they, like the uniconceptual daddy worshippers, must be persuaded to let their better, more liberal angels dominate.

**DON'T THINK OF AN ELEPHANT!: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate**
*by George Lakoff*
Chelsea Green Publishing

**WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH KANSAS?: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America**
*by Thomas Frank*
Metropolitan Books

**NATION OF REBELS: Why Counterculture Became Consumer Culture**
*by Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter*
HarperBusiness

Couldn't be simpler, then: redneck, chain-smoking, baby-slapping Christers desperately in need of some gender-free nurturing and political counseling by organic-gardening enthusiasts from Berkeley.

Not that many of Lakoff's followers can actually be expected to go out and even try to practice some of that "reframing" on mainstream America. Most are content just to cluster together and lament the deepening religio-social abyss that surrounds them. In the introduction to Lakoff's book, Don Hazen, the executive editor of AlterNet, a progressive news syndicator, outlines the "nightmare" in which liberal America currently dwells.

> After the Supreme Court gave the election to George W. Bush, Republicans were in charge of virtually everything. But in our hearts we knew that their ideas were far out of the mainstream and things were totally out of whack.

Haven't we heard that before, with but a few noun substitutions? Back in the early sixties didn't the Minutemen and the anti-fluoridation wing nuts, convinced that State Department Communists were "in charge of virtually everything," know in *their* hearts that they were actually right?

Sampling the dinner parties, salons, book events, and fundraisers on the liberalish West Side of Los Angeles over the past few years has been its own sort of nightmare, thank you very much. It features the liberal left as the new incarnation of the John Birch Society, the black-clad beneficiaries of studio residuals and university tenure—often banking family salaries deep into six figures (or much, much more), their offspring booked into $20,000-a-year prep schools—as the last-standing defenders of enlightenment and democracy. At one liberal party last year, in a sprawling Sunset Boulevard mansion bedecked with statues and gold leaf, where Aaron Sorkin and Rob Reiner clinked glasses with Lau-



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rie and Larry David, the Chanel-clad hostess (a very wealthy industrialist) mounted her staircase and, speaking to the all-Democratic crowd, vowed to dedicate her energies to fighting George W. Bush. To thunderous applause she announced, "We are tired of being disenfranchised!"

In the weeks following the election, as these same liberals were convincing themselves that another dark conspiracy had rigged the vote, the after-dinner chatter sometimes veered toward fleeing to Canada (good-bye Sunset Boulevard, hello Yellowknife). This was mere joking. As were the Web-circulated maps depicting a red-state "Jesusland" surrounded by a new blue-hued United States of Canada, which included the secessionist West Coast and New England of the former USA. Joking, yes. But joking on the square. Few are the Democratic activists who simply accept the unavoidable fact that they lost, that George W. Bush fairly and, um, squarely beat the stuffing out of them. Instead liberal—and especially progressive—rhetoric is increasingly laced with paranoia. A month after the vote the country's flagship progressive publication, *The Nation* (where I am a contributing editor), compiled the post-election analyses and prescriptives of two dozen left-of-center notables. And while some of these people offered sensibly straightforward and practical advice for Democrats, others had definitely gone round the bend. Juliet Schor, of Boston College, apparently unaware that in America voting is supervised by county boards usually of a bipartisan nature, wrote darkly,

> Republicans have steadily consolidated their control of the electoral process. Kerry got beaten in Ohio partly by a nefarious plan that denied Democratic precincts an adequate supply of voting machines. Nationwide, he lost votes to software breakdowns. How many is unknown at this point, as is the scope of e-fraud.

Unknown, but enough for Schor to suggest that this was how Kerry was beaten. Schor's conclusion—one more stolen election—is the key to her argument: "No amount of cultural repositioning will cure this problem." That is, no need for *us* to change. The blame is all external. (After nearly four decades on the political left, I can't remember a moment when liberals and fellow progressives have been so eager to offload their political woes on external forces.)

Troy Duster, an NYU sociology professor and a senior fellow at George Lakoff's Rockridge Institute (which focuses on, yes, reframing), wrote in the same *Nation* forum that the election results forced a choice between "two nightmares": either 60 million Americans "knowingly" ratified Bush's "right-wing ideology," or "we have just witnessed a second successive nonviolent coup d'état—a massive voter fraud that produced, among other anomalies, a gap between exit polls and paperless electronic voting tallies."

**Liberals ritualistically identify "gays, guns, and God" as the basis of right-wing wedge politics, but are reluctant to ask how much of their own politics is based on the very same formula.**

If we assume that Bush actually won, Duster continued, then we're facing something worse than fraud: that other F-word, fascism. Every industrialized nation, he claimed, has a "smoldering" right-wing base of 15 to 20 percent of the population, just "waiting to be stoked" by some fascist demagogue—maybe like George W. Bush.

> It is a mistake to think of 1930s Germany, Italy and Spain as exceptional and inexplicable political aberrations that could not happen here. We easily forget that those right-wing governments had strong electoral showings and sympathizers in many Western nations.

And progressives are supposed to let this guy help Lakoff help them reframe the political debate? Liberals are to go to the American people and explain how—thanks to having a strict-daddy world view—they've been "stoked" into becoming brownshirts?



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Duster has merely reframed Bertolt Brecht's aphorism that when the people can't be trusted to vote properly, we should dissolve them and appoint another in their place.

It's not just in the rarefied climes of *The Nation* that this sense of liberal unreality surfaces. Barely three weeks after the election the trendy MoveOn.org, the motor force of the so-called "Democratic wing of the Democratic Party," rallied its adherents coast-to-coast in a round of 1,600 house meetings. The assembled liberal activists—some 18,000—polled themselves and then published their top six political priorities. The results, in order, tell you all you need to know about the current state of progressive detachment and denial. Election reform and media reform came in first and second. The war in Iraq was third, followed by the environment, the Supreme Court, and civil liberties. In short, the biggest problems liberals face are those damned voting machines and Fox News. Glaringly absent from this activist wish list is anything vaguely resembling an aggressive populist agenda. The MoveOn plan provides no answers to those sweaty plebes out there who are "stoked" by *kulturkampf* rhetoric as well as all-too-real fears about their jobs, wages, health insurance, and school tuition.

But that's not really MoveOn's job. Groups like MoveOn are fundamentally echo chambers for Volvo Democrats whose lives aren't much affected by whether a Democrat or a Republican is in the White House, and who think it's a politically significant act to go with an audience of like-minded souls to view a flockumentary like *Fahrenheit 9/11* or *Outfoxed*, to set their TiVo to Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show*, or to pass around lefty spam containing fiery warnings of creeping fascism. A far more challenging exercise after the election would have been for MoveOn to order its troops to meet with and listen to ten people who disagreed with them—instead of talking, as usual, only to one another.

JOHN CUNEO

In one of last year's infinitely more thoughtful political books, *What's the Matter With Kansas?*, Thomas Frank wittily and skillfully deconstructed

READING LIST

## WAS IT SOMETHING I SAID?

*Five books by extremely engaging misogynists*

BY CRISTINA NEHRING

**Religio Medici**, *by Sir Thomas Browne* (1643). "I never yet cast a true affection on a woman," writes the revered seventeenth-century prose stylist whose exuberantly idiosyncratic account of his theology became a runaway best seller in his era. Woman, he declares, is the "crooked piece of man," and man has no greater misfortune than that he must commune with her to reproduce: it is "the foolishest act a wise man commits in all his life." Sir Thomas, for one, would much prefer "that we might procreate like trees." His confession is still dubbed the "ideal portrait of a Christian gentleman."

**Samson Agonistes**, *by John Milton* (1671). Possibly the Great Poet's most personal work, this play about the world's first suicide warrior (an Israeli!) fairly bristles with harangues against the fair sex. The biblical Samson's fury is not unjustified: his *goyish* wife Dàlila has betrayed him to the Philistines in Gaza. But the venom of his tirades exceeds all measure: "Out, out hyena," he cries on the approach of his penitent bride. The "best men" are "beguiled" by woman, the "poisonous bosom-snake," he rages. It's hard not to think that Samson is still smarting from Dàlila when he brings down the festival hall over the Philistines' heads, killing himself and them simultaneously. It is equally hard not to hear Milton's pain behind Samson's: deserted for several years by his bride and hated by his daughters, Milton remains our most famous poet to publicly champion divorce.

**The Joke**, *by Milan Kundera* (1967; favored English translation 1992). A fascinating novel whose crude and unusual misogyny has been overlooked in part because of its author's longtime membership in the unassailable class of Eastern European *victims*. No doubt the narrator "loves" women on some level (sexual and ego-bolstering), but he especially revels in their creative humiliation—as when his chief lover emerges from an outhouse with her underwear around her ankles, shitting uncontrollably because of her accidental ingestion of laxative pills in the place of the pain pills with which she intended to kill herself. This is cruel stuff.

**Collected Poems**, *by Philip Larkin* (1988). Not as blunt or as bad as his private letters (little *could* be), Larkin's poems nonetheless flaunt a healthy amount of cynicism. "They fuck you up, your mum and dad" has been called the most famous line in modern poetry, but Larkin's oeuvre teems with lines far more dismissive still, particularly regarding womankind and man's attempt to relate to it: "Not love you? Dear, I'd pay ten quid for you: / Five down, and five when I got rid of you." Larkin's strength lies in his jarring honesty about sexual relations (and also about solitude, aging, dinner guests, and art), which makes his poetry always riveting, rarely reassuring, and only sometimes what one might call "right."

**Thus Spoke Zarathustra**, *by Friedrich Nietzsche* (1885). This frolicsome, offensive, piety-busting romp through philosophical inquiry is only slightly degraded by its easy sexism: "Everything about woman has one solution: that is pregnancy," says Zarathustra, Nietzsche's alter ego. Outside his immediate family, Nietzsche didn't have much experience with women (though he did spontaneously propose to a few, all of whom rejected him). So one can forgive him a great deal—even the silly, playful words he puts in the mouth of Zarathustra's instructor, a female sage: "You are going to women? Do not forget the whip!" (In one of the few photos of Nietzsche with a woman, he is pulling a horse cart and *she* is bearing a whip.)

*Cristina Nehring is writing* Women in Love: From Simone de Beauvoir to Sylvia Plath: A Feminist Defense of Love *(HarperCollins).*



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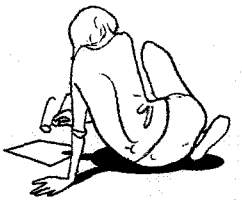
## A CLOSE READ

*What makes good writing good*

BY CHRISTINA SCHWARZ



*"The candles were cinnamon-scented and made my throat feel constricted. She lit them at the beginning of the meal, and by the end she seemed to have forgotten about talking about my father. She mentioned a book she'd been reading about Arizona. She offered to show me some pictures, but they, too, were forgotten. We watched a movie about a dying ballerina. As she died, she imagined herself doing a pas de deux with an obviously gay actor. We ate M&M's, which my mother has always maintained are not really candy, and went to bed early."* —from "Find and Replace," in **Follies and New Stories**, by Ann Beattie (Scribner)

Ann Beattie's short sentences and simple syntax hold the reader at a distance. *Here are the facts,* Beattie seems to say, setting each point neatly, squarely, against the one that precedes it. *Make of them what you will.* But of course she's not disinterested, and in her best passages, like this one (in which an adult daughter and her mother meet for dinner to remember the father and husband who has recently died), her clean, restrained style forms a still surface through which her underlying meaning can be clearly discerned.

In these lines Beattie effaces much of the evidence of the writer at work. She uses adjectives and adverbs sparingly, metaphors not at all, and hardly varies the cadence. Her repetition of the most basic sentence structure—subject, verb, object—beats steady time, but unlike writers who elevate concision and simplicity to such an extreme that they end up with stilted chop, she doesn't eschew conjunctions, and so her sentences read naturally. By artfully making her art recede, Beattie lets the few details that anchor the passage convey her story. With each cool sentence the daughter undercuts her mother's grieving. The "devotional" candles the mother has chosen make the daughter's throat constrict with allergy rather than emotion. The mother forgets and forgets again. The movie renders love ridiculous. Earlier in the story the mother has announced her intention to move in with a man, and herein lies the true source of the daughter's anger. With the final sentence the daughter exposes her mother as a fool, and her criticism is all the harsher for its indirection. Deluding oneself into a romantic attachment may be evidence of loneliness or practicality, but maintaining that M&M's are not candy can be nothing here but self-indulgence (although in another context it might be charming). And how much we learn about the daughter, who makes no attempt to prompt conversation about her father and who—like, I daresay, most of the rest of us—has long since given up arguing with her mother about things like M&M's.

Beattie's stories sometimes topple when her vivid imagination couples with her penchant for neutral delivery of sequential facts to produce a heap heavy with material and light on meaning. Here, though, Beattie's style works brilliantly—as, seeming only to report the events of an evening, she reveals the essence of her tale.

*Christina Schwarz is the author of the novels* Drowning Ruth *and* All Is Vanity.

what might be dubbed the Great Con Job: the conservative canard that somehow Democrats have cornered the market on elitism, while the GOP's bleeding heart is more with the little guy than with Enron's Kenneth Lay. He also argued undeniably that any hope for a liberal renaissance must include some component of aggressive economic populism (to counter the faux cultural populism of the GOP)—a fancy way of saying that the white working class must be able once again to identify with the Democratic Party. You'll remember that when a loose-lipped Howard Dean suggested the dead obvious—that he needed to win the votes of guys who drive pickup trucks with Confederate-flag decals—he was all but lynched by his nurturing, caring, gender-free Democratic colleagues. Oh, no, we don't want *those* people in our party!

Not to worry: as long as the most visible Democratic rabble-rousers are, literally, showbiz clowns like Michael Moore and Al Franken, liberals have yet some road to travel back before they run into a monster-truck jamboree.

Although Frank dedicates only a few pages of his book to actually examining liberal Democrats, he's not much amused by what he sees. The decline of labor unions and other social brakes on an increasingly unjust market "goes largely unchecked by a Democratic Party anxious to demonstrate its fealty to corporate America, and unmourned by a therapeutic left that never liked those Archie Bunker types in the first place." For some reason (a marketing decision by his editors not to unnecessarily rile liberals?) Frank's harshest and most insightful characterization of progressives comes outside the confines of his book—from both before and after the election. In a February 2004 essay in the obscure *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Frank mercilessly attacked aloof, self-absorbed liberals.

> Leftists of these tendencies aren't really interested in the catastrophic decline of the American left as a social force ... If anything, this decline makes sense to them: the left is people in sympathy with the downtrodden, not the downtrodden themselves. It is a charity operation.

And in a post-election piece in *The New York Times*, Frank concluded that the Democrats "lost the battle of voter motivation before it started," by choosing high-profile assistance from "idealistic tycoons" over a more natural class-based alliance with common people. As a result, "they imagined themselves the 'metro' party of cool billionaires engaged in some kind of cosmic combat with the square billionaires of the 'retro' Republican Party."

Seeing oneself as a cool metro in a struggle against square retros is, unfortunately, a deeply entrenched and self-defeating reflex on the American left. In their just published *Nation of Rebels*, the liberal Canadian professors Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter



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argue that an essentially self-gratifying "idea of the counterculture" has turned into "the conceptual template for all contemporary leftist politics," and that "counterculture has almost completely replaced socialism as the basis of radical political thought" (socialism understood, that is, as class-based politics rather than cultural expression).

Just as the action agenda that came out of MoveOn's post-election meetings indicates, progressives in fact typically identify themselves as such on cultural or social (or, if you prefer, moral) grounds, eschewing any straightforward populism that cuts across cultural lines. I've heard liberals, in their post-election malaise, obsess just as much over who they don't want in their ranks, culturally speaking, as over who they'd like to recruit. After some polls suggested that Bush won in November because a large percentage of Americans voted their "moral values," I was involved in discussions with dozens of panicked progressives who openly feared that someone, somewhere in the Democratic Party, might actually try to accommodate these lunatics. (Liberals ritualistically identify "gays, guns, and God" as the basis of right-wing wedge politics, but are reluctant to ask themselves how much of their own politics is based on a similar formula, if not the same one exactly.)

And so here we are. Blue versus red. Metro versus retro. Organic nurturant parents versus hormone-eating strict daddies. Heath and Potter remind us that this bipolar world view follows a straight line back to the 1975 novel *Ecotopia*, in which Ernest Callenbach imagined a day in the near future when northern California, Oregon, and Washington have "broken off from the rest of the United States in order to create an ecologically sustainable society." And to the 1960s notion of hippies versus straights. And to the Norman Mailer of 1959, compiling his Lakoff-like "The Hip and the Square" list, on which marijuana and Dostoyevsky were considered much cooler than alcohol and Tolstoy. It's all part of the left's dangerous and politically dead-end tendency to strike a pose counter to American mass culture.


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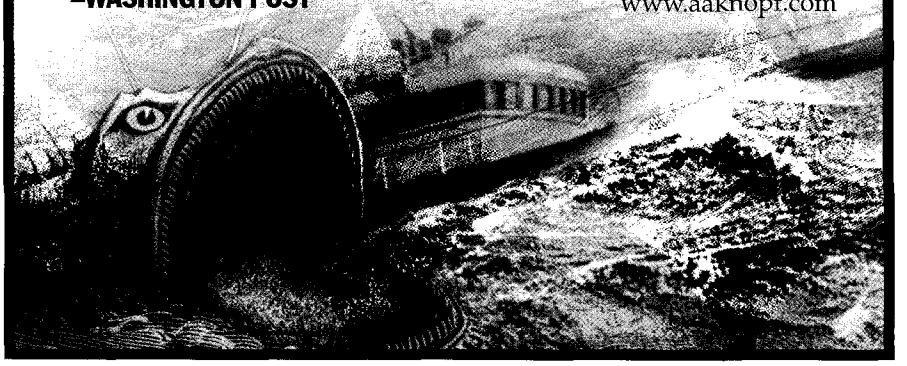

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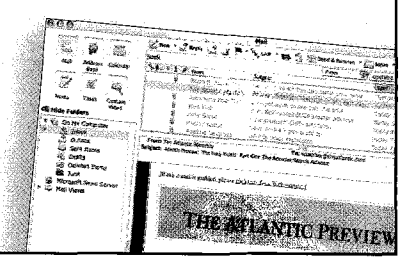





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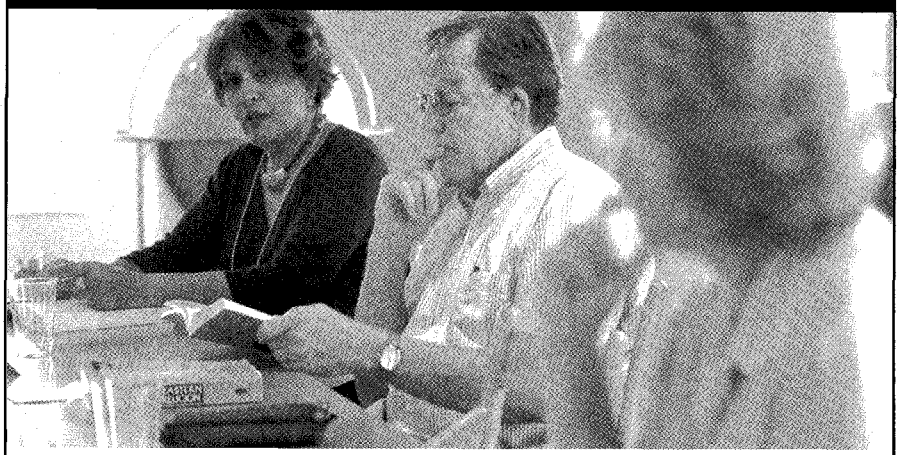

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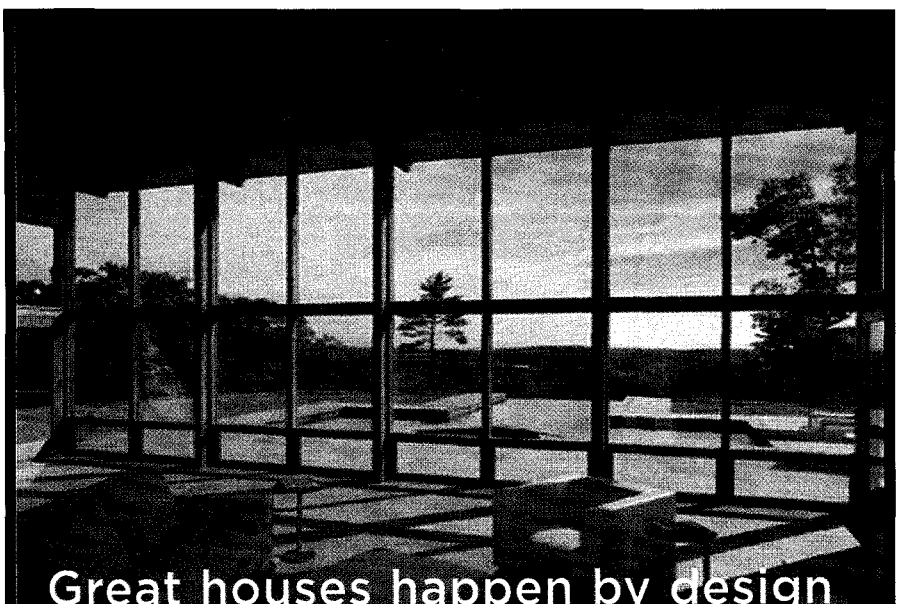

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As more data come in from last year's election, it seems ever clearer that the vote was not decided by some grand clash of moral or personal values. There's a much simpler explanation: Americans were terrified by 9/11, and a small majority of voters concluded, rightly or wrongly, that the incumbent was clear in his thinking on this matter—and that John Kerry, at best, hadn't anything much different to offer.

America, now more than ever, needs a vibrant, viable, progressive alternative. The challenge to liberals, then, isn't to reify their differences with a mythical red America and its strict daddies but, rather, to find common ground. Perhaps they ought to start by taking their own sermons about diversity a good deal more seriously. Diversity should be much, much more than a code word for racial affirmative action. It also entails, as Potter and Heath argue, "[making] peace with mass society" and learning to live with what the philosopher John Rawls called "the fact of pluralism." Modern America is large and, yes, diverse enough that it's absolute folly to think some sort of progressive or nurturant world view can—or should—become majoritarian. Who would want that sort of conformity in any case? "We need to learn to live with disagreement—not just superficial disagreement, but deep disagreement, about the things that matter most to us," Heath and Potter conclude.

The trick of effective politics—as opposed to thinly disguised self-affirming psychotherapy and aesthetically gratifying rebel poses—is precisely to unite people with different views, values, and families around programs, candidates, and campaigns on which they can reach some consensus, however minimal. Before liberals and progressives dash out with their new vocabulary to try to convince others of the righteousness of their values, they might consider spending some time listening to others instead.

*Marc Cooper is a contributing editor of* The Nation, *a columnist for* LA Weekly, *and a senior fellow at the Institute for Justice and Journalism at the USC Annenberg School for Communication. His most recent book is* The Last Honest Place in America: Paradise and Perdition in the New Las Vegas.



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BOOKS

# Civilization and Its Malcontents

*Alongside a "peace" demonstration in London, a crisis of micro-terrorism*

BY CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

I rather envy those who only after the "breakthrough" success of *Atonement* in the United States, or after *Amsterdam* won the Booker Prize, became readers and admirers of Ian McEwan. Ahead of them, rather than behind, lies the experience of reading *Black Dogs*, *The Cement Garden*, and (still, in my view, his masterpiece) *The Child in Time*. And this avenue of approach would make it easier to savor the maturing—now confirmed in the sober yet scintillating pages of *Saturday*—of a dual McEwan personality.

The "first" McEwan was (and is) a thoughtful child of the sixties, somewhat hippie-like in many ways, yet tense and gaunt and ironic behind his granny glasses. Much preoccupied with war and power and hierarchy, he helped to map the "alternative" ethos of those who could at least imagine a world without exploitation or bigotry or sexual jealousy. The summa of this Green and quasi-feminist outlook was to be found in the libretto he wrote for the composer Michael Berkeley, whose oratorio *Or Shall We Die?* provided a highly sensitive register of the anti-nuclear angst that accompanied the Euro-missile debate of the mid-1980s. "Shall we have womanly times?" inquires the chorus in this work. "Or shall we die?"

If one resorted to easy categorization for the sake of convenience, and termed this the "soft" McEwan, there was undeniably a "hard" McEwan in the wings, sometimes prompting himself. This McEwan had been brought up on British military bases overseas, possessed a working knowledge of martial history, could tell you a few things about how a campaign was fought and how the tougher applied sciences were deployed. The two McEwans fused in a useful fictional synthesis, in which the innocent and the idealistic were very often made to confront the nodes of brute reality, or the presence of evil and death—which frequently manifested themselves in the most banal circumstances.

The action of *Saturday* takes place within the twenty-four hours of February 15, 2003. This was the actual day when the whole of *bien-pensant* Britain moved into the streets to jeer at George Bush and Tony Blair and to denounce the coming Anglo-American intervention in Iraq. Henry Perowne, a skillful and flourishing neurosurgeon living in the very center of London, finds himself troubled by more than the resulting traffic jam. He is not above the fray, or outside it, but, rather, at a slight angle to it. He does not put any particular faith in the government, and his talented children are with the demonstrators in their hearts, yet his practice has introduced him to an Iraqi exile professor, who has told him what life is really like in the abattoir state of Saddam Hussein, and Perowne's honesty and scruples make him a reluctant prisoner of this knowledge.

No assumption is less safe than that an author's thoughts are his characters' thoughts, which are conveyed in this case in a Runyonesque historical present ("He rises ..." "He strides ...") that solidifies the context and the actuality. However, one does not have to know very much about the author to realize that Perowne has Ian McEwan's wife, Ian McEwan's parents, a representative cross-section of Ian McEwan's children and stepchildren, and also Ian McEwan's house. This is located in the sub-bohemian area known—after its centerpiece in Fitzroy Square—as "Fitzrovia," a neighborhood already familiar to the readers of Anthony Powell, Patrick Hamilton, and Julian Maclaren-Ross. Having furnished these apparent pointers to himself, McEwan makes a knight's move in the opposite direction, giving us a vivid idea of Perowne's revulsion from much modern literature.

> What were these authors of reputation doing—grown men and women of the twentieth century—granting supernatural powers to their characters? He never made it all the way through a single one of those irksome confections. And written for adults, not children. In more than one, heroes and heroines were born with or sprouted wings ... Others were granted a magical sense of smell, or tumbled unharmed out of high flying aircraft. One poor fellow spotted through a pub window his parents as they had been some weeks after his conception, discussing the possibility of aborting him.



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Here a reproof to *The Satanic Verses* is immediately and rather startlingly succeeded by a brusque dismissal of the crucial scene in the author's own *The Child in Time*, which was published in 1987. It is not self-evident to me that McEwan intends any repudiation here, but certainly nothing is even remotely "magic realist" about *Saturday*, unapologetically anchored as it is in the material world and its several discontents. And I think I would surmise that the following is McEwan speaking, whether "through" Perowne or not, about the "anti-war" crowd.

> All this happiness on display is suspect. Everyone is thrilled to be together out on the streets—people are hugging themselves, it seems, as well as each other. If they think—and they could be right—that continued torture and summary executions, ethnic cleansing and occasional genocide are preferable to an invasion, they should be somber in their view.

And then a sinister note is struck, instantly succeeded by a stress on the innocent and the inane.

> A placard of one of the organizing groups goes by—the British Association of Muslims. Henry remembers that outfit well. It explained recently in its newspaper that apostasy from Islam is an offence punishable by death. Behind comes a banner proclaiming the Swaffham Women's Choir, and then, Jews Against The War.

This same dryness and measure is very much present in McEwan's nonfiction writing since 9/11, inaugurated by an essay in the *Guardian* in which he very daringly underlined the three words—"I love you"—that were most commonly used in the final messages of those trapped on the planes and in the towers, and managed, without any appeal to gross sentiment, to fashion this into a perfect, cool indictment of the murderers. Perowne's Saturday actually begins before dawn, when he glimpses an airplane trailing fire over London as it descends, and wonders if he is witnessing the beginning of another atrocity. He belongs to the camp of those who believe that September 11 was a hinge event, rather than an annoying interruption to the lofty struggle against globalization.



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Although the narrative is relentlessly about "today" (Tony Blair makes an appearance under his own name and *in propria persona*; in contrast, Mrs. Thatcher was intriguingly disguised for her cameo in *The Child in Time*), the subtext of the novel is concerned with the fascinating arcana of the mind-body distinction. In broad daylight, and in consequence of a trivial traffic accident that arises from the "peace" demonstration, Perowne comes face-to-face with self-destructive violence and aggression. His neurological expertise allows him to make an on-the-spot diagnosis of Huntington's disease in his assailant: "This is how the brilliant machinery of being is undone by the tiniest of faulty cogs, the insidious whisper of ruin, a single bad idea lodged in every cell, on every chromosome four." And we are somehow put in mind of the random damage and danger being caused, a continent and a culture away, by the psychopathic regime of Saddam Hussein.

McEwan has made a special niche for himself as a chronicler of the physics of everyday life and of the capacity of the quotidian to serve up sudden indigestible helpings of risk and alarm. He is at his best in these latest pages, rehearsing the concertina effect of time on the West London rush hour, and delivering a virtuoso description of the aerodynamics of a squash game, the latter so absorbing that it can be read with pleasure and illumination even by a sports hater like myself. A form of individual and existential annihilation less noxious than Huntington's is also presented, when Perowne goes to visit his mother—a woman stranded in time and afflicted with amnesia and nominal aphasia. This phenomenon is by definition hard to put into words, but McEwan's ear for the luckless yet unknowing woman's chatter ("She wants to come on one of them long things but she doesn't have the fare") allows him to bring it off with deftness and compassion.

In his understated but sturdy main character he gives us an instance of one of the best who lack all conviction. Perowne feels that he has earned what he enjoys—his lovely house and his sleek new car—but that he has to keep on justifying his good fortune. Stephen, in *The Child in Time*, was visited by the same anxiety in a different form.

> For years he had convinced himself he belonged at heart with the rootless, that having money was a merry accident, that he could be back on the road any day with all his stuff in one bag. But time had fixed him in his place. He had become the sort who casts about for a policeman at the sight of the scruffy poor. He was on the other side now.

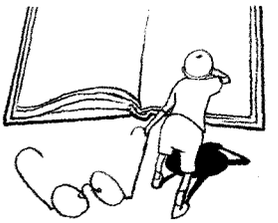
Perowne is similarly apt to examine and suspect himself, but more inclined to reason the matter, and not quite so guilt-ridden.

> After the ruinous experiments of the lately deceased century, after so much vile behaviour, so many deaths, a queasy agnosticism has settled around these matters of justice and redistributed wealth. No more big ideas. The world must improve, if at all, by tiny steps. People mostly take an existential view—having to sweep the streets for a living looks like sim-

## A CLOSE READ

*What makes bad writing bad*

BY JON ZOBENICA



Dave Eggers's *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, a memoir full of practiced idiosyncrasy and contrived candor, revealed nothing so much as the author's X-rated affection for the sound of his own voice. His latest effort, the story collection *How We Are Hungry* (McSweeney's), is a far more temperate, generally melancholic affair. But in it a certain voice keeps popping up oddly: that of the irrepressibly manic memoirist.

This is detectable in his often unbefitting use of faux-Wodehousian analogy: "The woman at the mercado had dirty blond hair, like margarine full of crumbs." Another character uses a particular word "liberally and randomly, like some use curry." Still another has "a short-shorn blond beard that wraps his face as a bandage would a man, decades ago, suffering from a toothache." Striving for a sort of naturalism, Eggers draws attention to inessential details, but seems instantly fearful that they will be uninteresting without a touch of cartoonish coloring. (Less charitably, one might wonder if they're merely a pretext for such coloring.) Or perhaps he fears that certain observations simply risk being clichés, and so above all narrative considerations he makes strenuously sure to express himself with the utmost originality.

The final, brief paragraph of the story "Quiet" reveals how disruptive his war on cliché can be. After maintaining a claustrophobic romantic tension throughout—partly by way of some linguistic restraint—Eggers serves up this couplet: "The moon was striped by the blinds but I could see its nickly shimmer on the bay. It looked like aluminum foil, when crumpled and then smoothed with a thumb or the back of a knife." That first sentence, unconcerned with novelty, does no narrative harm, whereas the elaboration that follows reads like part of a cooking-show transcript, and only shatters the mood.

Just as Eggers's tone in this collection can at times be too cute for its own good, so too can it be jarringly, deliberately deranged—another carry-over from *AHWOSG*. Thus, apropos of virtually nothing, we get these expressions of fleeting impulse, which are frank and unrevealing in equal measure: "Pilar wanted to cut stomachs open with glass." "She wanted to rub herself in bananas. She wanted to open umbrellas into the faces of cats, make them scurry and scream." "I wanted to eat her vomit." "I wanted to be cut to pieces and eaten."

In *AHWOSG*, Eggers's voice was a narrative end unto itself, and as such could wander freely, in multiple directions at once. Taking full advantage, he produced an entire cliché-defying book—one that despite a built-in pathos had an overwhelmingly prankish tone. Fiction like what he's now writing (typically episodic and naturalistic) is built on a narrative logic that can easily be undone by stylistic departures. If the rigor of such fiction proves to be too much, Eggers might do well to seek another, freer outlet. As exasperating as it can be, his is a voice best used liberally, not randomly.

*Jon Zobenica is a staff editor for* The Atlantic.



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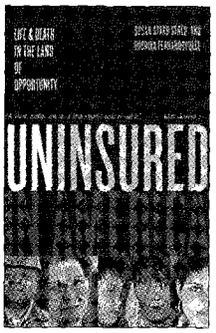
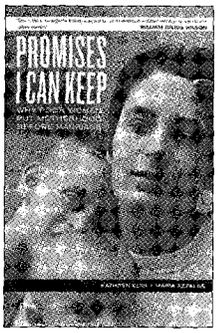
# HEALTH AND BODY POLITICS

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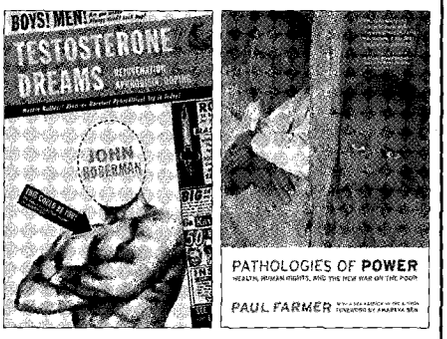


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ple bad luck. It's not a visionary age. The streets need to be clean. Let the unlucky enlist.

The unluckiest of all, however, really do suffer from biological determinism. These are the deranged, disintegrating radically under that smooth, highly evolved curve of skull which Perowne is so adept at opening up. One of his street-smart children tells him that it's amazing he's never been mugged, living as he does in a posh house in a rough district. And when the violence comes, horridly fast and hotly flavored with class resentment as well as madness, the master of the scalpel finds he cannot wield even a kitchen knife in his own defense.

The catharsis—a climax of terrorism and hostage-taking on the micro rather than the macro scale—is something I will have to leave to you. I betray nothing, however, if I say that McEwan deploys poetry as the arbiter. Again, he is at one level strictly literal and factual, citing the work of England's present-day poets—James Fenton, the laureate Andrew Motion, Craig Raine—with the directness of his earlier novelistic references. Perowne himself doesn't "get" poetry. He prefers the more reliable rhythms of music and machinery, and he puts his faith in the minute strokes and compelling symmetries of brain surgery. But he is "saved" by the salutary effect of a poem on a disordered mind.

This tribute to the sheer salience of language is succeeded and confirmed, in a passage of ice-cold prose mastery, by the healing power of science and technique. Reason, if you like, is restored to its throne, and the prosaic and the professional have their moment of honor and glory in turn. With this novel the soft and the hard McEwan come into an exquisite balance, just as the thin and objective blade pares away at the spongy, vulnerable tissue of the cerebellum. The man who could staunchly write, as the southern extremity of Manhattan was still awash in fire and stench, that in effect *Amor vincit omnia* here lucidly shows us that civilization and culture and the life of the mind, fragile as they seemingly are, nonetheless have a resilience that can outlast barbarism.

*Christopher Hitchens is a contributing editor of* The Atlantic *and a columnist for* Vanity Fair.



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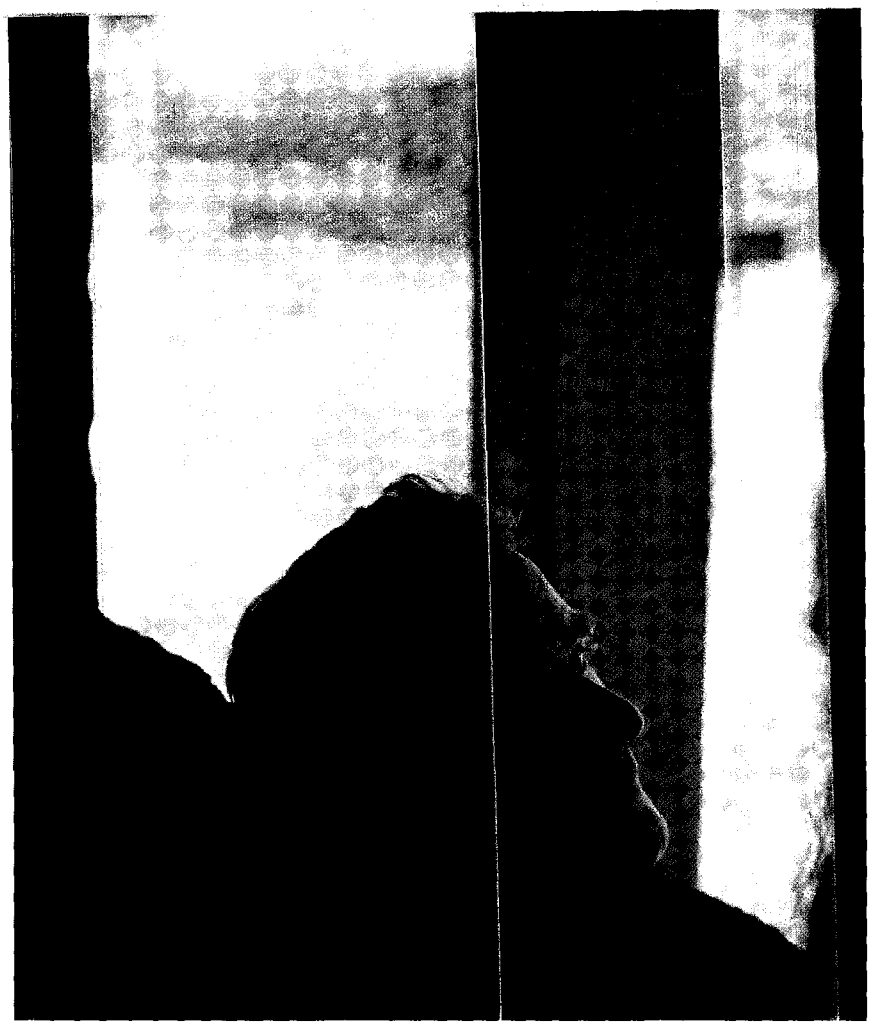

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BOOKS

# Tradecraft

*Rightly championed for decades by genre and literary readers alike, John le Carré has written a novel that may appeal to neither camp*

BY B. R. MYERS

A short and straightforward tale of espionage: today it is hard to imagine such a novel securing critical recognition for an obscure writer. Luckily for John le Carré, *The Spy Who Came In From the Cold* (1963) appeared at a time when people still wandered freely between the literary and genre sectors, sometimes even forgetting where they were; it felt more like occupied Vienna than Cold War Berlin. Both J. B. Priestley and Graham Greene praised the book in the strongest terms, hardly minding that they were agreeing with people who had enjoyed Ian Fleming's *The Spy Who Loved Me* a year earlier. It wasn't long before the postmodernists arrived on the scene, vowing to obscure the line between elite and popular culture altogether, and in the sense that a towering wall was erected in its place, they certainly kept their word. But by then le Carré's good name had already been established, and both sides still respect it forty years on.

ABSOLUTE FRIENDS
*by John le Carré*
Little, Brown

Looking back, the much vaunted break with the 007 tradition doesn't seem quite so clean as all that. Though highly literate, and endowed with greater gifts of observation and imagery than most of today's prizewinners, le Carré is hardly an intellectual writer. Like Fleming, he fawns over his good guys, displays a fierce pride in a conventionally imagined Englishness, and scripts foreign characters according to national type. Also like Fleming, he deals in male fantasy: Alec Leamas, the hero of *The Spy Who Came In From the Cold*, may have been a snappish fifty-year-old operative, but he was just as interesting to flight attendants as Bond was, and his girlfriend was barely out of her teens. How strange that critics consider it escapist tripe when a dashing young man wins a pretty young woman, and unflinching realism when the young woman invites a nondescript middle-aged man home for no apparent reason at all—though to be honest, I now prefer the latter kind of book myself.

The James Bond novels abound in embarrassments, from gobbets of nonsense presented as hard-won expertise ("the smell of danger … something like the mixture of sweat and electricity you get in an amusement arcade") to absurdly connoisseurish leering at women. Le Carré put a stop to most of these things while finding new ways to make the reader squirm. The occasional burst of iron-manliness is bad enough in itself: "And Jack—dear Jack—you have your marvellous old attaché case, as faithful as the dog you had to shoot." But it is even harder to take when expressed in the primly mournful tone of Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*, a novel of which le Carré is an avowed admirer: "And Magnus goes. Magnus always goes. Even when a sharp smack across Mary's chops would be the wiser course, Magnus goes."

There are also passages that make one realize how liberated the Bond girls were by comparison:

> Then she felt ashamed, because she knew she should have cleaned and tidied. Jumping up, she fetched the carpet sweeper and a duster from the kitchen, and set to work with feverish energy. She found a clean teacloth and spread it neatly on the bedside table and she washed up the odd cups and saucers … "Alec, don't be cross, please don't," she said. "I'll go, I promise I will, but let me make you a proper meal. You're ill, you can't go on like this, you're … oh Alec," and she broke down and wept, holding both hands over her face, the tears running between her fingers like the tears of a child.



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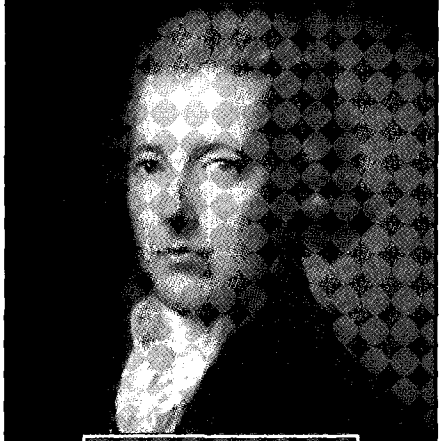
*William Pitt*
THE YOUNGER



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The smart reader forgives these little things, because le Carré's best novels are some of the most exciting stories ever written. They are exciting because he wrote them with this goal uppermost in mind. "I would wish that all my books were entertainments," he has said, and to his credit he never uses that word in the shamefaced way that Graham Greene did. So why do "serious" types consider his work to be something else entirely? (An American interviewer sought to compliment him by saying that "entertainment" is "not a word usually associated with le Carré.") The answer seems to be that the very stratagems he uses to make his work exciting have always made it seem quite highbrow as well. Take *The Spy Who Came In From the Cold*: the gloomy tone lends plausibility to a story in desperate need of it, as gloom has done since Conan Doyle and continues to do in Hollywood. (Fleming knew the principle, and although he couldn't keep his writing joyless enough, one of his choices to play 007 on film was the long-faced Richard Burton—who ended up playing Alec Leamas instead.) But the fact that le Carré's England feels as bleak as his East Germany was interpreted by some as a repudiation of the Cold War mindset and thus of the entire spy genre. Meteorological relativism was taken for the moral kind, and the hero's grumbling about dirty methods pored over as if it betokened a Scobie-like inner struggle. Ever since then le Carré has been the "moral ambiguity" man, though his hero was really just fretting, as the best good guys often do, about sinking to the bad guys' level. Fretting needlessly, I might add: if the author really thought it wrong to trick a totalitarian enemy into executing one of its own intelligence officials (and it sounds like a great idea to me), he would have done a better job of making us agree with him.

In the famous trilogy of the 1970s —*Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (1974), *The Honourable Schoolboy* (1977), and *Smiley's People* (1979)—the gloom was augmented by an element of willful difficulty that made everything seem even more authentic for the reader, and even more serious for the critic. The battle between spymaster Smiley and his Soviet nemesis, Karla, was so complex that it all but required a foldout chart to follow, and the prose often lapsed into a dense combination of Britishisms and spy jargon: juju men were sent spare and graded Persil; they felt like Gordon at Khartoum. At times le Carré seemed not to care whether the average American reader understood him at all, an attitude that never fails to make the average American critic sit up and take notice. The books are still remembered on both sides of the Atlantic for their "sophisticated analysis of moral questions," as a British newspaper recently put it, though one would need to have been raised on a very strict diet of Don DeLillo to find this sort of thing profound:

> [Smiley] thought about treason and wondered whether there was mindless treason in the same way, supposedly, as there was mindless violence. It worried him that he felt so bankrupt; that whatever intellectual or philosophical precepts he clung to broke down entirely now that he was faced with the human situation.

**_Absolute Friends_ is le Carré's first truly bad novel. Everything is set down in the revoltingly roguish tone of a writer twirling a moustache with his free hand.**

Of course, moral issues do not have to be articulated in order to be explored, but at the very least a writer must make readers doubt the hero a bit themselves. Le Carré, however, will not even allow us the critical distance we feel in the presence of Bond, who is described on the cover of a new edition of *Casino Royale* as "chillingly ruthless." Someone is always reminding us that Smiley is the perfect dear if not the perfect spy, and the cordiality with which his idiosyncrasies are detailed can be downright cloying. His self-doubt—if that's not too grandiose a term for what seems largely



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Jack Hannah in ***You Will Not Taste Death: Jesus and Epicureanism*** recognizes the notes as chronologically ordered and correlative with the skeletal history used in the *Gospel of Mark*. Hannah provides all the text of *Thomas* and all Marcan context, and upon this develops a narrative about Jesus that is tenably historical.

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a matter of reading German poetry and having the occasional "weep"—is there mainly to recommend him to us, like a metaphysical version of a white hat.

Sixty years ago the British writer William Sansom wrote a short story about a man climbing a very high ladder and becoming more and more afraid. "The Vertical Ladder" is a masterpiece, at once pure thought and pure action, though like most of the best short stories of the twentieth century, it is hopelessly out of print. To track it down and read it is to realize how absurd the current "serious"-versus-"genre" divide is—to realize that a tale of suspense can be as intellectually rewarding as any other. Film critics already know this; hence the esteem in which Hitchcock has always been held. But book reviewers confer honorary "serious" status only on storytellers who, like Elmore Leonard, have a sufficiently showy prose style, or who, like le Carré, are thought to have some moral or philosophical message. As with Sansom's story, however, the true value of the Smiley trilogy is inseparable from the tension created by the plot. Because the frightened characters are all spying on one another, their awareness of every sight and sound, every nuance in their counterparts' speech, is heightened to a level that is often poetic. Nothing is "analyzed," thank God, but the stories bring our own lives of deception into sharper focus. Anyone who has ever worked in a competitive organization will recognize the poisonous atmosphere of the mole-riven spy agency in *Tinker*, as well as the paranoia evoked in its classic scene of an office meeting: Have they been talking behind my back—or do they know I've been talking behind theirs? Unlike the American tough guy, the English man's man is allowed to be literate and thoughtful, so le Carré is able to assume the perspective of his spies without imposing limits on his own sensibility. In *Tinker* a man snooping in another's office hears what is probably a car braking outside, and it sounds "like a single note played on a flute"—a perfect comparison that would seem wrong in, say, a Jack Ryan novel.

But if thriller writers must write well enough to keep us from skimming

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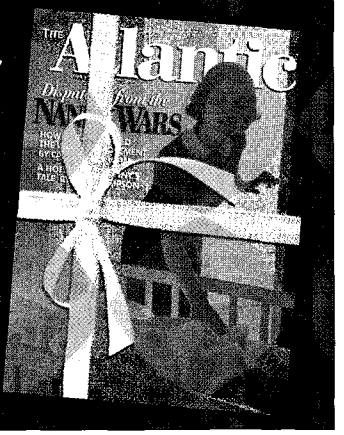

to the action, they must also keep our attention on the story and not the prose. Few have the combination of talent and self-effacement needed to strike this balance, and no one maintains it with le Carré's consistency. This is an example of the standard reached on almost every page:

> Last night there had been a storm, he remembered ... He had watched it from the mattress while the girl lay snoring along his leg. First the smell of vegetation, then the wind rustling guiltily in the palm trees, dry hands rubbed together. Then the hiss of rain like tons of molten shot being shaken into the sea. Finally the sheet lightning rocking the harbour in long slow breaths while salvos of thunder cracked over the dancing roof-tops. I killed him, he thought.

Any of today's up-and-coming mediocrities would know what to do with a description like that: set it off from the rest of the text, pad it out with tautology and outright repetition, link everything into one breathless sentence—and wait for someone at *The New York Times Book Review* to hoist it reverently into an excerpt box. But le Carré pulls back from an obtrusive display of virtuosity. He keeps things short, sets them down in a summary tone (First ... then ... Then ... Finally ...), and moves right along, the story being paramount. No wonder the merits of his prose are so often overlooked. Praise tends to focus on his uncannily authentic-sounding dialogue, which manages to bring even marginal characters to life.

> His hands still in his pockets, his head high against his shoulders, Brotherhood turned stiffly to Nigel. "I'm going to tell her," he said. "You want to throw a fit?"
>
> "Are you asking me formally?" Nigel asked.
>
> "Not particularly."
>
> "If you are, I'll have to pass it to Bo," said Nigel and looked respectfully at his gold watch as if he took orders from it.
>
> "Lederer knows and we know. If Pym knows too, who's left?" Brotherhood insisted.
>
> Nigel thought about this. "Up to you. Your man, your decision, your tail-end. Frankly."

The charge of pomposity once leveled against the author in a literary spat



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would have been absurd even if it hadn't been leveled by Salman Rushdie. As down-to-earth in interviews as he is in his writing, le Carré was the first to tell people not to take his novels too seriously—that in the interests of a satisfying story he had fitted out his spies with more intelligence, in both senses of the word, than probably pertained in real life. Alas, since the Iraq debacle we no longer need him to point this out; it has become easier to swallow the notion of a spy's bankrupting a casino, or jumping a boat over a bridge, than to believe that the British "Circus" and its American "cousins" ever had much in the way of useful information to exchange. That the Smiley stories nonetheless retain their power to enthrall us is perhaps the most impressive proof of their creator's skill.

Much as a beautiful woman will rush out and change her hairstyle if complimented on it often enough, so do artists hate being told that they have found the ideal outlet for their talent. It's likely, then, that few people in the West were as glad to see the Berlin Wall go as the man who for so long had been touted as a kind of novelist laureate of the Cold War. Since then le Carré has written a succession of thrillers on subjects from the Panama Canal to the pharmaceutical industry, and his readership is still largely intact. Most fans of a fast and literate story can be counted on to give his latest a chance, and even those who end up reviling it on Amazon.com make a point of saying they can hardly wait for his next. His more serious readers, being serious readers, prefer to regard themselves as humble sponsors of his creative development; no matter what he writes, they try to find something in it, if only a scene or a character, to hold up as a worthwhile addition to an impressive body of work. The Smiley books, however, were the last ones everyone was able to agree on. Although each side still claims the author as its own, each routinely feels let down by him, and there is hardly a novel among his last nine that hasn't been criticized for being either too artsy or too Clancy.

*Absolute Friends* (2003) stands to reunite the fan base at last, but not in a

## NEW FICTION

*Finds and flops*

BY CHRISTINA SCHWARZ

When I learned the subject of this novel, I felt a twinge of envy. How inspired to fill out Mr. March, absent from nearly all of *Little Women* but, as a chaplain in the Civil War, probably up to something quite as interesting as the tribulations of his four daughters at home. Transcendentalist, abolitionist, ascetic, vegetarian (nearly, in fact, a vegan), the idiosyncratic March—whom Brooks based on Louisa May Alcott's father, as Alcott based her "little women" on her sisters and herself—is that most admirable and exasperating type: an idealist who strives to practice what he preaches. Having managed to acquire, with no more than his will and his wits, a remarkable education and a respectable fortune (he gives the latter entirely away), March has good reason to believe that he can accomplish anything he sets his mind to. But of course he's disillusioned at almost every turn, by his fellows and by himself. Brooks, unfaltering in her use of elevated, lyrical, Victorian language, has him state the crux of his difficulties thus: "How often it is that an idea that seems bright bossed and gleaming in its clarity when examined in a church, or argued over with a friend in a frosty garden, becomes clouded and murk-stained when dragged out into the field of actual endeavor." For such a man quandaries, the richest meat of any novel, abound: he wants to be honest with his wife, yet he cannot bear to disillusion her about the war or about himself; he wants to save lives, but he can't bring himself to take one to do so; he believes the war's cause is just, yet its conduct is anything but.

**MARCH**

*by Geraldine Brooks*

Viking

In her first historical novel, *Year of Wonders*, Brooks fell into the common trap of making a character sympathetic by giving her anachronistic attitudes. The protagonist in that novel, though winning, is so tolerant and enlightened that she's unconvincing as a very young, uneducated seventeenth-century woman. (Similarly, slaves and ex-slaves in this novel, being almost without exception wise and heroic, are too good to be true.) But in March, Brooks dares to create a man of his times, who believes that curbing his wife is among his proper duties as a husband. She also allows him to be as self-righteous as might be expected of someone with his fervent, high-minded convictions. I recall thinking, even as a child, that although Meg praises her father for going to war when he didn't have to, the choice was rather self-indulgent—and Brooks seems to be of the same opinion. Nevertheless, the naive earnestness and ready affection with which Brooks endows him, the high standards he sets for himself, and his remarkable willingness to admit mistakes make him wonderfully likable, even when he is egregiously in the wrong. The same cannot be said for his wife, who is almost always in the right but not nearly as endearing. In an afterword Brooks writes that her mother cautioned her about Marmee: "Nobody in real life is such a goody-goody." Brooks skillfully preserves Alcott's Marmee but renders her human by giving her an ungovernable temper like Jo's (for which I would like her better if it weren't so consistently in the service of her unimpeachable convictions) and a habit of silent suffering and secret complaint. Although I readily sympathize with her self-pity (she, after all, must manage all the difficult consequences of her husband's impractical ideals), sadly, I cannot love her for it.

Brooks's narrative is remarkably tight. Whereas much literary fiction wallows in digression, here every scrap of information propels the story forward. Her references to *Little Women* will evoke for quantities of her readers a beloved companion of girlhood. What remains, however, long after the last page has been turned, is the vibrant elucidation of the idea at the heart of this novel—that even the loftiest of human undertakings are inherently "clouded" and "murk-stained"—and, even more vividly, the lofty and murk-stained March.

*Christina Schwarz is the author of the novels* Drowning Ruth *and* All Is Vanity.



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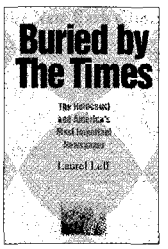


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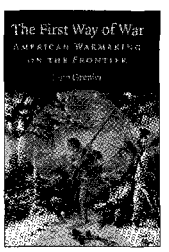


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way anyone could have wanted. This is le Carré's first truly bad novel, one that seems almost calculated to give the lie to each building-blurb of his reputation. A gift for plotting? No sooner are we introduced to a florid middle-aged tour guide called Ted Mundy, a man with a vaguely and unpleasantly familiar name and no claim on our curiosity, than we are treated to well over two hundred pages about his youth and how he became a spy. The more we hear about him, the less we care, because everything is set down in the revoltingly roguish tone of a writer twirling a moustache with his free hand.

> And if [Ted] hadn't signed up for Wulfila, he would never have found himself, on the third day of his first term at university, sitting buttock-to-buttock on a chintz sofa in North Oxford with a diminutive polyglot Hungarian spitfire called Ilse ... he will hang up his musket for her any day, just as long as her impatient little heels keep hammering his rump on the coconut matting of her anchorite's horse trailer ...

As for that legendary ear for human speech, le Carré has in the past shown a readiness to put his hand over it when he needs to impart some hard information. The protagonists of *The Little Drummer Girl* (1983) and *The Constant Gardener* (2001) are both lectured by characters who are obviously speaking for the author. But nothing was ever like this:

> "I have in mind such thinkers as the Canadian Naomi Klein, India's Arundhati Roi, who pleads for a different way of seeing, your British George Monbiot and Mark Curtis, Australia's John Pilger, America's Noam Chomsky, the American Nobel Prize winner, Joseph Stiglitz, and the Franco-American Susan George of World Social Forum at Porto Alegre. You have read all these fine writers, Mr Mundy?"
>
> "Nearly all." And nearly all Adorno, nearly all Horkheimer and nearly all Marcuse, Mundy thinks ...
>
> "From their varying perspectives, each of these eminent writers tells me the same story. The corporate octopus is stifling the natural growth of humanity."

The action, when it finally comes, is so brief and simple that it's hard even to touch on it without giving everything away. Suffice it to say that the Americans launch a military attack in response to a trumped-up threat in Heidelberg, whereupon the German chancellor expresses regret that his country "should apparently have been selected as the showplace" for anti-American activity. In another dismal first the author lampoons his own villains.

> For [the chancellor's] conservative critics the statement was insufficiently abject ... And what's this weaselly *apparently* that has crept into the text? Go down on your knees, Mr Chancellor! Grovel! Have you looked at Germany's bank statements recently? Don't you know that America will only do business with its *friends*? Don't you realize that they still hate us for siding with the French and Russians over Iraq? And now *this*, for God's sake!

As ghastly as this stuff is, le Carré must have had great fun getting it off his chest. Let this be a reminder to us readers that when a writer says he wants each book to be an entertainment, it's not necessarily *our* entertainment he has in mind, although of course we're expected to pay for it either way.

There can be no excuse for *Absolute Friends*, but there is an explanation. The third or so of the text that most people will consider the actual story was clearly inspired by the invasion of Iraq, which was only a few months old when the manuscript was finished, in June of 2003. Either the author foresaw the war with enough certainty to start writing about it back in 2001 or 2002, or he wrote the novel in a fraction of the two years he usually needs. Or—and this is the only way to make sense of that interminable flashback—he wrote Ted Mundy's life story with a different book in mind, and then called it up at the last moment to do service in an anti-imperialist rant. I'm all for anti-imperialist rants, but an anti-imperialist novel would have gotten the message out to more people, and done a more subtle landscaping job on le Carré's moral high ground. A president sells his country a war under false pretexts, and a writer allows the corporate octopus to market his shoddiest book as the one that "fans have been waiting for." Only betrayal, to quote the man himself, is timeless.

*B. R. Myers is a contributing editor of* The Atlantic.



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STAN FELLOWS

SHORT STORY

# Bullheads

*He wanted to thank God for his life, and he did. He didn't know what was next, but saw no point in being fearful now*

BY MICHAEL LOHRE

During the last week of March—on Hurricane Lake, a lake so small and obscure it must be found mapped on the county township plats for rural southwestern Minnesota—Leroy Johnson, a cash-crop and livestock farmer, had a turn of character while doing his early-morning fishing. What happened was that at the age of eighty, for the first time in his life, he felt so sorry for a caught fish that he threw it back in the water.

Leroy still took four fish home to eat for breakfast, so it wasn't a total turnaround. But he could almost hear that one fish sucking for air on the dock. He couldn't. He was old, and could barely hear his alarm clock unless it stood three feet away from his head. But the fish had struggled next to his boot as he sat there, and he was bothered, not that it would be eaten but that its death was being prolonged needlessly. Leroy thought he should either kill the fish or release it back to the cold lake and not have such a show of the mouth going open and shut, trying to draw water through the gills when only air was available. Too much drama was involved.

His mysterious and sudden feelings surfaced for a bullhead. This was not a majestic muskie or a delicious walleye; no ferociously toothed northern pike or blue-bellied crappie as big and round as a dinner plate. No, this was a bottom-mucking bullhead, and damn if Leroy Johnson didn't almost come to tears for the spiny-headed devil before he finally kicked it off the homemade dock, and thus put an end to the philosophical struggle between them right then and there.

Still, valuing one shade of animal over another so greatly seemed wrong. Leroy knew that without the worms he baited hooks with, his life as a farmer would be in danger.

Because thousands of lakes pocket Minnesota, people think of some bodies of water as *theirs*, and Leroy considered Hurricane Lake his lake in that way. The lake shimmered beside his best eighty acres of cropland, his family's original homestead, and since Leroy first walked, the lake had been an everyday part of his life. It had given him more than he could ever measure, and he wanted to remember that.

Leroy recalled a time thirty years earlier, on a more public lake eight miles across the section. He had been sitting in a duck boat fishing when he saw four adolescent boys catching bullheads and throwing them on the ground. The boys had a baseball bat; to Leroy's amazement, they started tossing the fish to one another, practicing their most furious home-run swings on the bullheads. A sickening *whop* followed, but the boys seemed to think swinging at the fish was the funniest thing they had ever done. Leroy could barely talk, he was so disappointed; he trolled in, secured the bat, and let those boys know they could not continue with their stupidity.

Having a conscience was a good thing, and Leroy lived a life that was evidence of that fact.



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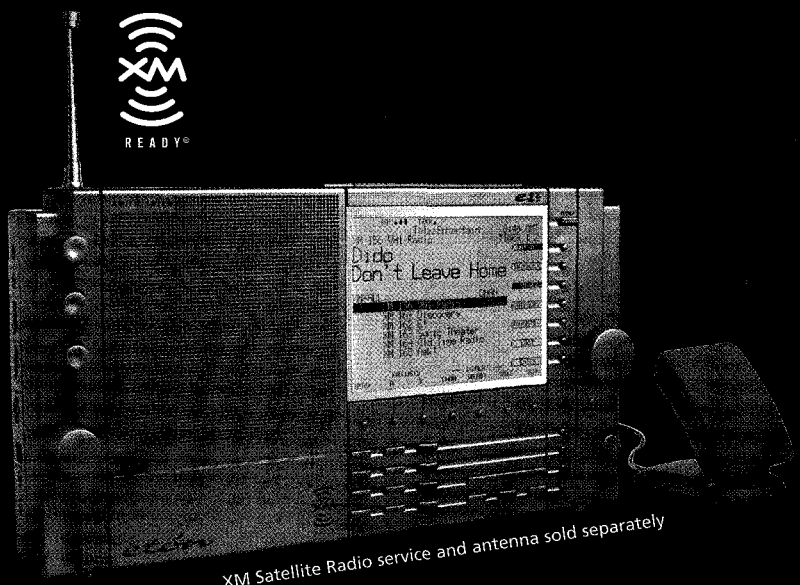


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A half hour later, back on the farm and cleaning the stringer of perch and walleye he'd kept, Leroy lopped off their heads with his hatchet and then threw the heads to Sister, his old Irish-setter mix. Sister carried them away to bury somewhere behind the machine shed, as was her habit with dead things she did not care to eat. The only female in a litter of thirteen pups, Sister always had her own stubborn intentions, and she was so smart that Leroy sometimes joked she might be the first dog in the world to actually speak a human word.

Today he thought she wanted to say, "Where's the bullhead you had on the dock? Why don't I get to dig a hole for that one?"

Leroy slowly bent down and rubbed Sister on her favorite spot: the breastbone. "That fish still had swim in him, girl. You should have seen him wiggle away when he hit the water."

Although Leroy Johnson had a near holy respect for animal life, he was certainly no tree hugger, and as he fished the next days, he wondered what had gotten into him. He puzzled over self-righteous vegetarians and animal activists, because he felt almost everything in life could be good for you if you didn't abuse it. If God had not wanted beef to be consumed in tremendous quantities, it would not taste as good as it did. Leroy believed that eating meat was a luxury, but so was not eating it. He had witnessed, in the work camps during World War II, that when truly hungry only the rare human being would stand on ethics about diet. The story of the Donner Party told him that people would sometimes eat human flesh if they had to. The choices in a person's life were not always clear, and sometimes not even available.

The weather still acted like winter, and Leroy felt good stepping into the house porch and taking his heavy coat off. After throwing his boots in the closet he decided to limit himself to three fish for his stringer each day. Then, as fast as he could, Leroy washed, filleted, and cooked the fish for late breakfast. He couldn't cook like Doris, but he wasn't fussy. His standards had lowered over the three years since she had passed.



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For a week the memory of that gasping bullhead still flashed in Leroy's mind. He realized that he was really trying to think about his wife and the months of trouble she'd had breathing with lung cancer. Like when a fish has swallowed a hook so far that you have to almost pull the guts out of it to remove the hook—that's how he thought of his wife's cancer. The disease ruined her deep inside and started her rotting, and once that hook was set and yanked, no surgery could correct it. The cell mutations began in her chest, and the mass just grew and grew, filling her lungs until it moved up into her throat and then she had to gag on it every day. The smell of that sickness reeked worse than rotten soybeans, and Leroy gagged on it himself many times, even though he was not the one who had to die from it. He remembered having to stop the car one summer day and get out for fresh air while driving Doris to chemotherapy. He stood bent over and dizzy, and he threw up in the gravel on the shoulder of the road. He felt ashamed that he could not bear to stay in the car with her, but Doris was sorry for him and forgave him.

The images of his wife and the fish groping for air became intertwined in his memory and almost made him dizzy. His wife meant more to him than the bullhead, so Leroy was confused to find them edited together in his memory's slide show. He questioned the way his mind worked lately, but decided he shouldn't place so much weight on any one loss, because the world was full of loss, and if you stopped to retch through every injustice or mystery, you would never stand straight. Leroy liked to carry high spirits and, like most people, usually had a way of ignoring almost everything outside his orbit if he had to. Yet in the days following this bullhead he made himself concentrate his images and think about only the fish. The bullhead had become mythic somehow, and thinking about it made him feel even more blue.

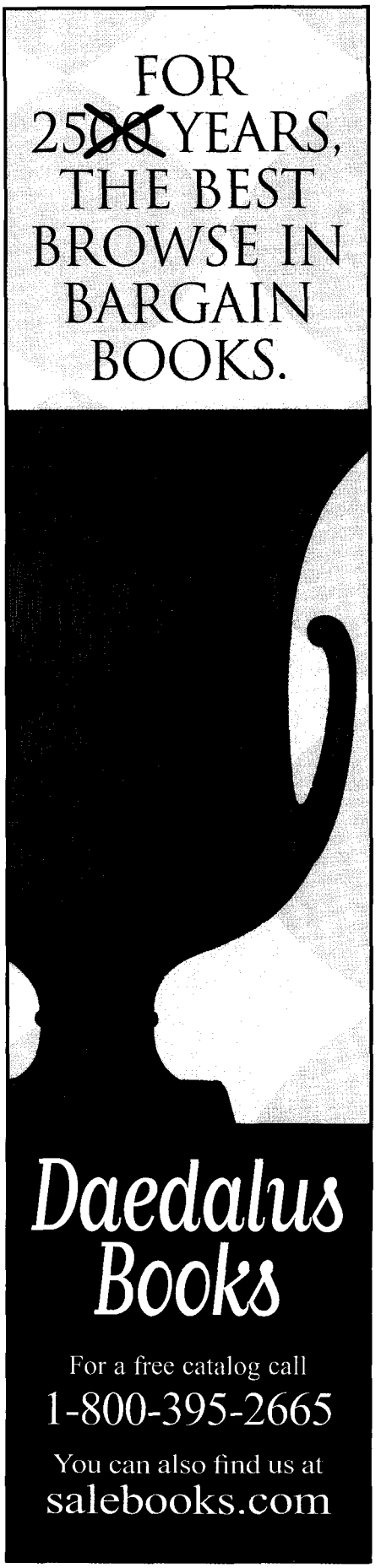
Leroy continued April by deciding to shoot his TV. His frustration had been building for weeks now, swinging between sentimentality and rage. Today he was ornery when he woke up. He swore at the blankets because he couldn't get his feet out of them, and then swore at his feet, which were as stiff as cold taffy in the morning. He hated them for complaining. He wished they would just loosen up and get on with it, and his restlessness was fueled by his inability each day to walk without a limp until noon. He believed that a little shooting today would improve his mood.

Shotgun blasts in the early-morning quiet might get him arrested in the city, and that's what he loved about living in the country. He had no neighbor within a half mile anymore, and if anybody was driving by on the blacktop and heard, they would probably think he was shooting pop bottles, or committing suicide. Either way, they wouldn't be able to do much about it.

Because of his kids, he'd developed this desire: to take the TV out of the house, drag it into the yard, and shoot the son of a bitch. The feat would be Elvis-like, but without the drugs and the extravagance. What an adventure to actually do it. He'd spent the night before trying to find something to watch on the satellite and wishing in the end that he had just the one station he'd had until the 1990s, so he could either watch or turn it off. Now he raged at his own addiction. He'd been birthed in this very same farmhouse in 1925, and the family had struggled by for forty years without a TV. Now Leroy wondered how his life had become so neatly divided into before TV and after TV.

When he was raising four kids and couldn't yell them into coming out of the house to work in the fields, that's exactly what he had wanted to do: get rid of the distractions while he could and while he still had the kids around to be a father to and spend time with. But they had always wanted to watch TV instead, and because he denied their pleasures, all four of his children at one time or another had labeled him a slave driver.

So be it. At least he had taught his kids to work, even if they did all leave and want never to see the farm again. He should have killed the TV before it killed them. He rubbed the Zenith





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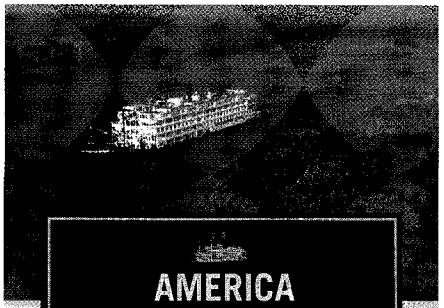
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label at the top of the cabinet and thought to himself, *I'm gonna shotgun this devil.*

But first he had to drag the big sucker through the porch, out the door, off the deck, and into the yard. He started wrestling with it, and found that he could still have his way with it if he was careful not to twist his back. He had always been a powerful man, but he'd gotten heavy at the waist over the past fifteen years, and his legs and back were suffering. His legs looked almost goatlike, with flintrock knees and only a weathered slab of knobby muscles covering the bones.

Leroy's most distinctive features were his hands and cigar-like fingers. When the local Quaker meeting disbanded for lack of members, he'd looked for a church for his family. The preacher at the Baptist church had made the Johnsons all stand up the first day they attended. The preacher had shaken Leroy's right hand and commented on the size of it. Leroy was not big on crowds or attention, so he just nodded; then, to his surprise, the preacher tried to make conversation in front of the whole church audience, and asked Leroy how his hands had become so massive. Leroy had replied that it was from pulling tits.

Even though a few farmers in the pews thought that made perfect sense, because they knew Leroy was talking about hand-milking cows as a boy, most of the other people and the preacher himself found Leroy's language a little too real for the occasion. They avoided rather than welcomed him after the service was over. Leroy eventually attended Lutheran services.

Leroy had some arthritis in his hands, but he secured a strong grip anyway and waddled the TV halfway across the living-room carpet before he decided he didn't need to shoot it dead in order to avoid watching it. Moreover, if he shot it he'd have to get rid of it—load it and haul it to the county landfill. He waddled the giant cabinet back into the corner and left the set unplugged. He felt a little defeated.

His son Dean had given it to him as a Christmas gift. He could get 100-some channels, and he had a dish out on the tree pointing toward South Dakota. But it had taken more than a year to learn how to work the son of a bitch. Same thing with the computer his daughter Pam had given him: he'd managed to learn how to get on the Internet and check the markets, but the screen was always so full of those pop-up windows that he was driven almost crazy. On top of that the machine would freeze up like a December river, and then he'd be left banging the side of it with his palm, to no avail. He didn't know how people could stand to look at computers every day. He'd rather go without than diddle around on that thing anymore, although he had hoped to be able to get some e-mails from his children.

To hell with it, he thought. He unplugged the computer monitor too.

The next day the phone rang at 6:15, and when he answered it Leroy had to pretend he had been awake. Most days he no longer got up at 5:30, as had been his habit for about sixty-five years. For the past fifteen years getting up that early had been too difficult. And for the past few years, especially, his body had seemed to require more sleep.

"Hello?" Leroy said, cranking the knob on the mail-order speaker device so he could hear better.

"*Er du oppe?*"

"Oh, ya," Leroy quickly replied. "I've been up for quite a while already."

It was Oris Scarset. His wife had died the year before, and Leroy already knew why he was calling. After church the previous Sunday, Oris had told Leroy he was interested in getting a housekeeper/date, and hinted that he wanted help. Oris was four years older than Leroy, and they'd known each other since they were boys in a one-room country schoolhouse. Both of them had left school by sixth grade to start working full time.

"I was wondering what was on that computer of yours for women."

Since Oris's tone was somewhat bashful, Leroy asked, "Do you mean for dating?"

"No, one to live with me," Oris said. He was always a man of some candor, and had a lot of energy. In fact, he



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looked quite a bit like Norman Vincent Peale. Oris had roller-skated once a week since his twenties, and kept it up even after his wife died. This amused Leroy, because Oris must have been fifty years older than the next oldest customer.

Leroy laughed. "I think you might have to take them out to eat and maybe even dance a time or two before they do that."

"Why? Have you looked for one?" Oris asked jovially.

"No, no," Leroy replied. "I'm not ready for that." He added, "I've never tried it, Oris, but I've seen some ads on TV. Those Country Couple ads seem to be the thing. I heard Oliver Munson, over in Slayton, found somebody." Leroy did not mention that Oliver Munson was a pup yet, at fifty-seven.

"Maybe we can find one in there then, if you know how to work it," Oris said. "I've never run one."

"I'm no expert myself, but I think I can get it dialed in."

"Okay, then, Leroy. I'll be over in a while."

Leroy spotted Oris coming up the walkway from the yard at 6:40. He shook his head, because he'd barely had time to get dressed and brush his teeth. The day was very cold for April, and Oris wore only a windbreaker. He walked at a good gait, but held his head down for the wind, and wrapped his arms around his wiry frame to keep his windbreaker from flapping up. The wind had been raw for days, blowing out of the northeast, steady. The high had been 28° the day before, as if it were late February instead of early April.

After Oris warmed up, they had a conversation over coffee about the best planting dates for sweet corn, and then about the old days. Oris had built a couple of barns in his younger years, but now he worked mainly as a painter (mostly outbuildings on farm sites) and a gravedigger, and took care of four local cemeteries. He'd helped Leroy out many times over the years when Leroy was short on help, and they ran some of that grist through the mill before Oris came to the point: "Can you help me get a housekeeper?"

Leroy thought that Oris was being naive, but he admired his innocence and his willingness to try not to be alone. He waited until they were sitting in folding chairs in front of the computer to say, "You're probably not going to get someone to keep house for you at your age, Oris."

After an hour of searching and then filling out questionnaires they discovered that not within 200 miles were there any women in his age range looking for a date.

"I guess they're all crippled up or dead," Leroy said.

"That's probably about right," Oris said. "Most people don't keep themselves in that good shape."

He sat upright in his chair and gestured at his belly: he had only a small paunch. "I'm glad I've always kept up my roller-skating."

Although Leroy thought it was wrong, they pecked away for another half hour to refill the forms and drop Oris's age

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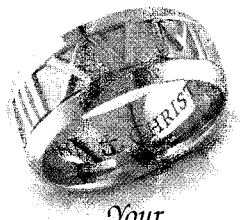

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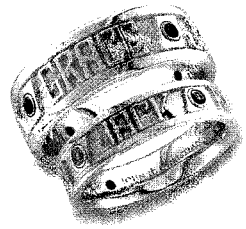

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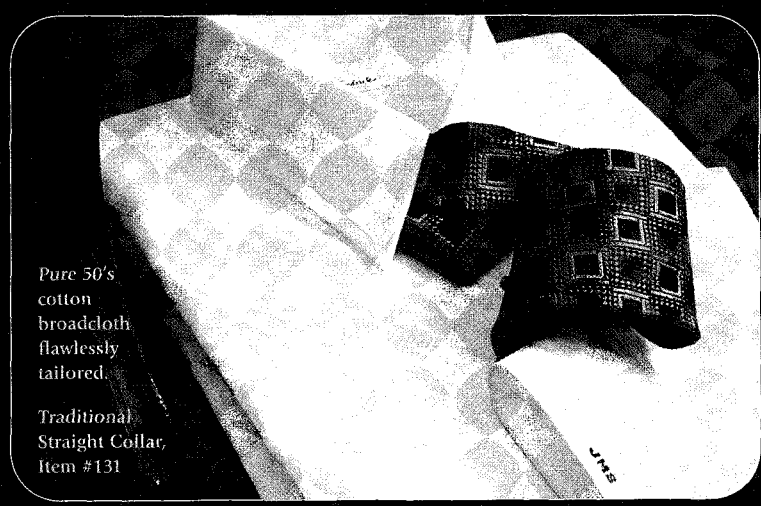

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down to seventy. Fourteen years seemed like quite a trimming, but Oris convinced Leroy that it would do no harm.

"It's lucky I don't have to send a picture yet," Oris said. "But some people have told me I don't look a day over eighty."

Sure enough, some results came up from the Minneapolis area, but they were rather sophisticated women.

"I wonder if I'd have to make quite a few concessions," Oris said.

"I believe so," Leroy said.

The prospects didn't look good, and the computer had tired both of them out.

Oris had a narrow face anyway, and his cheeks looked drawn now. Leroy remembered how Oris had taken care of his wife in their red farmhouse for three years before she died. She had been a dear, hardworking woman, but in her last years she had suffered from terrible incontinence and had to be wheeled into the bathroom many times a day to be cleaned up. Leroy didn't blame Oris for not wanting to be alone, but he also believed that that was the reality, and that Oris would be better off accepting it.

When Oris put his boots and coat on in the porch, Leroy stood next to him and said, "You better put your earflaps down today or that wind will push your thoughts out your ears."

"That wouldn't be the worst thing, would it," Oris said, slowly pulling the flaps down. He was trying to look happy and make a joke, but he was obviously really hurting.

Leroy put his hand on Oris's shoulder and said, "You'll have to get over it, Oris. Just go through the process, you know."

Oris nodded and smiled. His eyes were as blue as the sky.

Four days later Oris had a heart attack while trying to sort lambs in his barn, and fell over dead. Three days after that Leroy was a pallbearer at his funeral. They put Oris in the ground on a day that was even windier and colder than the day he had visited. The church council didn't know whom to hire to backhoe the grave, since Oris had always done it, but then the council members discovered that Oris had already dug a



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hole for his coffin next to his wife's grave, in the very back corner of the cemetery. Nobody had noticed it until they went out to find a spot to bury him.

Since he was in town for the funeral anyway, Leroy decided he'd stop up and see his older brother, Elvern, in the nursing home. What a sad son of a bitch he was; but it was still the right thing to do, to visit and give him the news.

Elvern had been a trapper and a corn sheller until five years earlier, when his whole body seemed to start giving out all at once. His wife was still alive, but she had emphysema and was on a machine so much that he could talk to her only about fifteen minutes a day. They both had to be fed by nurses in their rooms. Elvern was so lonely that he'd become a man who could easily start talking to books or windows or old hair combs. The place was depressing, and Elvern had become so negative and argumentative that talking to him was nearly impossible. You could say it was a nice sunny day, and he'd say we needed rain. You could bring up an old friend or story, and Elvern would find a way to associate an injustice to himself with the narrative. The place was killing his spirit, and no wonder nobody wanted to come and visit.

*What kind of a society do we live in?* Leroy thought as he walked past the reception desk and was not even acknowledged by the head-down nurse seated there. He was starting to regret he'd set foot here himself.

On the way to Elvern's room he passed an open doorway and saw another old friend, Raedar Knutson, a lifelong bachelor, lying on his side and trying to suck air and not even recognizing Leroy when he stood and called his name. Leroy grew angry again and thought he'd like to bust Raedar out of this place. It was killing him and killed everybody who lived there.

He'd like to take old Raedar home for company one more time, because Raedar had always been fairly good coffee company. He was one of the few people who actually stood out for the old way of stopping by people's houses and talking—both when Leroy had the time and when he didn't. Work wasn't always No. 1 with Raedar. He had taken one trip back to Norway, his only experience outside Minnesota, and he could tell you every detail of that grand trip, with about half of it in Norwegian because he became so caught up in the moments he'd had there. Leroy had heard it so many times, but now he longed for those stories again. By God, those were the days when anything was still possible.

Now Raedar had cancer too, in his pancreas, and from some fluke in the chemo he'd lost the ability to swallow, so he had to lie on his side or he'd drown from drool. It was a miserable disease, Leroy thought, and it ought to be eradicated from the earth. He stopped in the hall and thought about all the people who tried to live with dignity, no matter what their differences of color or creed. AIDS should be eradicated too, he thought, though he had never gone that far before. So should all this shit, the old man decided, as he walked down the halls and looked into dying people's rooms.

No *wonder* nobody wanted to come into these nursing homes. He couldn't do it today, he decided, so he walked back out to the parking lot, squatted into his Buick, and drove home to the farm.

All of a sudden he was full of rage, and he noticed he was almost warping his steering wheel by gripping it so hard to drive and turn corners. He arrived home and spun his tires on the gravel up the long driveway to the farmhouse. He took a look at the garden plot next to the grove. Problem was, the plot was still the same size as when he and Doris had raised four kids here.

Here he was, eighty years old and still trying to farm. Still trying to raise hogs. He'd given up all the other livestock, but twenty feeder pigs still remained. *What kind of a fool am I?* he wondered. The garden was the hardest work for him to do, and yet it gave him the most direct, hands-on pleasure on the farm. He didn't know if he could get down and work close like that this year, and yet he didn't want to sit around and wait to die, either. He'd tried to make himself give it all up, but he wasn't the motor-home-to-Arizona type.

He'd do it somehow. He covered his ears against the raw wind and looked

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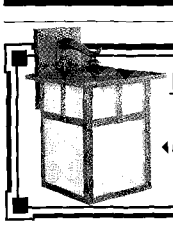
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at the black plot of tilled garden soil. He imagined sweet corn all along the east edge of the plot, and thought about the conversation he'd had with Oris about sweet corn over coffee that last day. He'd told Oris about a coon that had been eating all his sweet corn two years earlier. Leroy had set a live trap with peanut butter as bait, and had caught the rascal on the first night.

This was in the months following his wife's death. Instead of killing the coon, he had tried to domesticate it. He kept it in a cage out in the machine shed, but all it wanted to do was sleep all day, and it seemed miserable.

Oris had said, "They're nocturnal, you know. He probably livened up at night."

"No," Leroy had said. "I checked on him at night, too, and I had to poke him with a stick just to get him to move."

"Did you kill him, then?"

"I didn't have the heart to do it," Leroy said.

Leroy had taken the raccoon down near the lake and let it go in the cornfield there. The coon had taken off like a rabbit once he cleared the mouth of that cage.

"I would have done the same thing," Oris said.

Leroy had wanted to tell him about the bullhead, too, because the stories were in his mind together, but it was a good conversation as it stood. He felt less angry now that he thought back to that time when Oris had visited and they were alive together in the kitchen, drinking coffee.

So he really had turned into a softie. Or maybe he was turning back into a softie after a time of hardness. He didn't feel too bad about it. He was a Quaker, for God's sake, and had even spent three years in a work camp in California during World War II. He was grateful for those who had fought Hitler, but happy with himself for doing what he believed was right. After the horror of the Holocaust was revealed, for years he'd brooded about the usefulness of pacifism in the face of a known beast like Hitler. But in the past twenty years he had gathered more and more satisfaction from what he had done. Solving things with force still seemed stupid, but Leroy also realized that rage was a human urge that had to be resisted, and at times he had not done much resistance himself. He would have to hope that God was merciful.

What Leroy needed, he felt, was to stop thinking so much and do some work. He felt better than he had in town, but also restless, as if something was building inside him that he couldn't control. The day had been full already in some respects. He slipped into the house, changed clothes, and put on his thick jacket and chore gloves. Then he went out into the orchard and walked around in the stunted grass a little bit and thought, *Maybe I'll put that new belt on the mower.* Fixing machinery tended to settle him down.

Even though he would have no grass to mow for many weeks, particularly if the weather stayed cold, he decided to tackle the Woods-style belly mower on his old Case tractor. He used the woodshed as a windbreak, and parked the tractor next to it so that he could work in the daylight outside even though it was cold. To install the new belt by himself would be a challenge, but Leroy thought he was up to it.

Put too much pressure on, and the belts will twist on the pulleys. It's a hell of a job once that happens, and the whole deck has to be lowered so that you can adjust the pulleys and straighten out fourteen feet of belt. Sister licked his face a lot while he shuffled around on his back, working under the mower. After nearly an hour he thought the belt and all eight guides were installed correctly and wouldn't twist on him when he engaged the power take-off.

He stood up and leaned over the axle to hit the starter button.

The next thing Leroy knew, his feet were off the ground and he was being carried across the yard by the tractor. He'd had the throttle almost all the way forward, and the old Case stopped just short of a huge walnut tree when Leroy popped the gears into neutral and jammed down the brakes.

He'd fallen over the axle between the fender guards and the seat when the tractor had lurched, and he'd had



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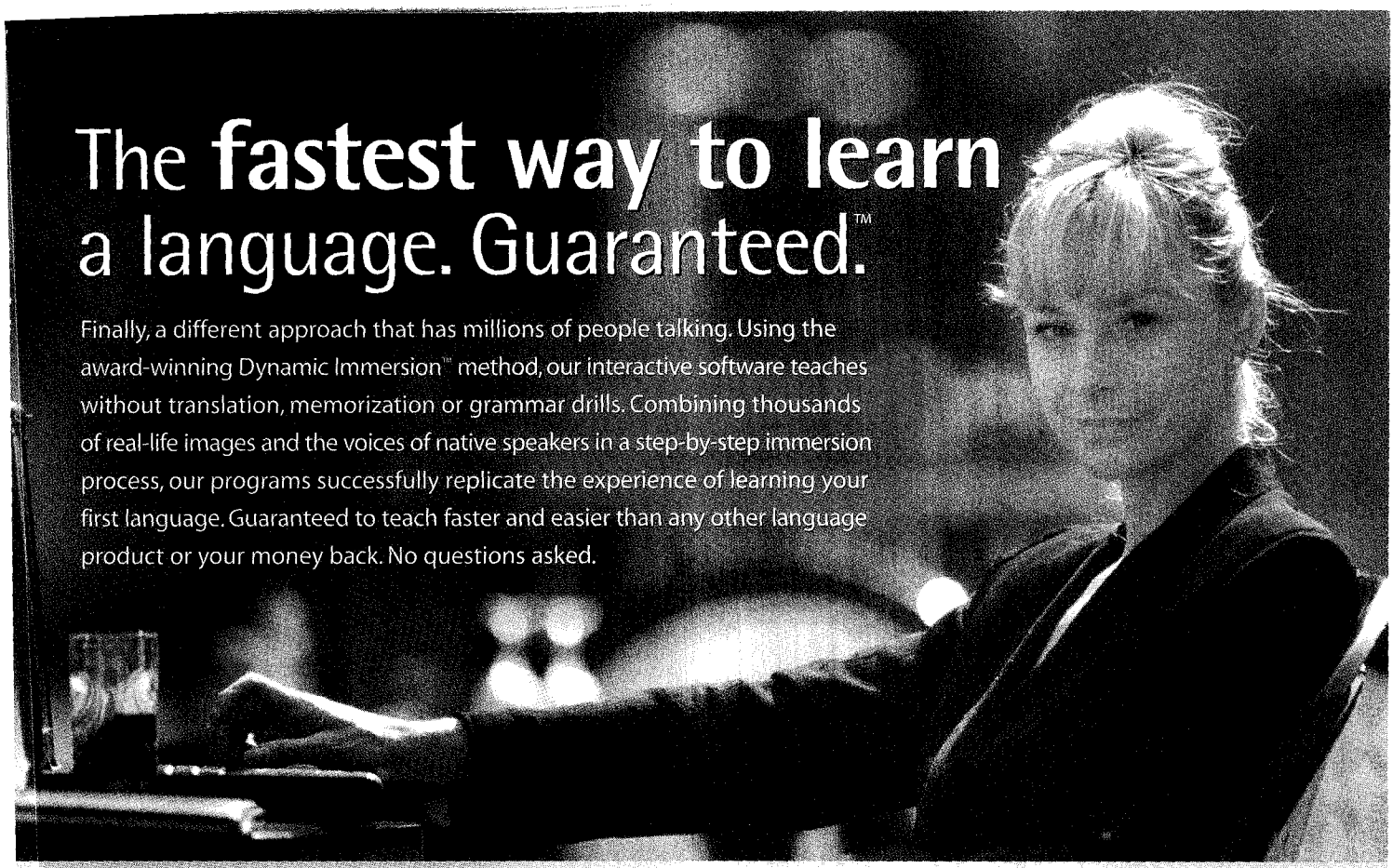

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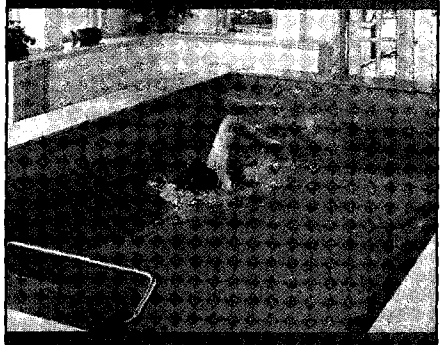

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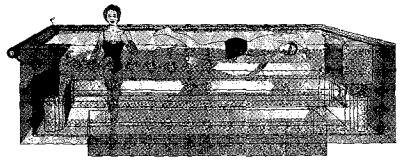

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to work hard to get his arms unfumbled and find the gearbox. When Leroy straightened up, he felt a pang in his ribs. He'd banged them pretty hard when he fell forward over the axle, and they would be a little sore for a few days. But he was lucky.

He'd made a little mistake and left the tractor in first. He knew that if it had been in reverse, he would have been badly hurt or killed, because it would have traveled right back over him. He felt fortunate now, but he also understood that he must be more diligent. He wasn't very quick of mind anymore in some ways. His memory was fading and he knew it. Leroy had more long-term memory than he knew what to do with, but he couldn't even remember exactly what he'd had for breakfast that morning.

The thought of spending the rest of the afternoon and evening in the house sickened Leroy. He knew he probably should do just that, because his ribs were sore, but Leroy decided to stay outside anyway. He fetched his rifle from the porch and grabbed a scarf to protect his neck from the wind. Oris had said a few chunks of ice were still off the east side of the lake, half a mile away, and it might be fun to target-shoot some of them once he reached the lakeshore. He called Sister as he walked out the door, and she was happy to come from under the porch. She already knew what he had in mind, and she started down the driveway ahead of him. Ever the unpredictable dog, Sister had disappeared when Leroy had the mishap with the tractor, but now she was right on the trail.

Leroy walked down his gravel driveway, across the blacktop, and through a small wild meadow. His ancestor Halvor Johnson had picked this area because of the meadow and the lake. In fact, after his arrival from Norway, Halvor had lived in a dugout on the banks of Hurricane Lake for two years, the first year alone and the second year with a mule. That had been the start of Johnson farming in Cottonwood County, and back then Sioux Indians were living right in the area and passing through this very same meadow for

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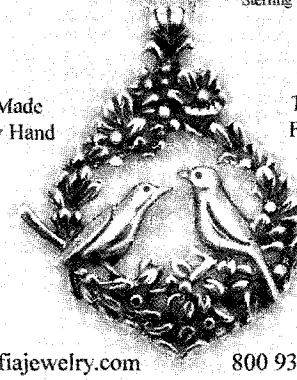

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hunting. Four burial mounds rose on the northwest corner of the meadow. Nobody but the Johnsons and the state of Minnesota knew about them.

Leroy liked it that way, and didn't want anyone digging them up for treasure. The Sioux were often buried with items for the next life, and in Leroy's mind the Sioux were with God. If you took their spears, arrows, or corngrinders away from the graves here, they could lose them in the life after. Maybe what you *believed* you got in the next life *was* exactly what you received from God. That didn't seem impossible to Leroy, but he wasn't sure either. He was content to find out about those unanswerables when his time came.

Sister loved the meadow, and Leroy knew the walk was a good idea for both of them. He was a slow walker, and the coarse winter meadow grass stood up thick past his boot tops. Sister ran circles into the reeds and sloughs and scared up pheasants and partridges to amuse herself while she waited for Leroy.

The beauty of the birds as they rose above the meadow was majestic. A ring-necked pheasant in flight was one of the wonders of nature, and Leroy felt sorry for anyone who had never seen it.

Once they reached the woods that surrounded the lakeshore, Sister settled down into a pace right beside Leroy. A path wound through the trees and down to the Point—a piece of land that necked out into the center of the small lake. That's where the fishing dock stood as well, but the lake was too windy there, and Leroy wanted to travel another 150 yards up toward the southeastern shore, near Halvor Johnson's old dugout spot. He would be on high ground there, where the land rose in a steep bank about twelve feet above lake level. A grove of trees to the southwest blocked a bit of the wind, and a pretty vista across sparkling blue waters appeared once they arrived at the trail above the dugout. Here Halvor Johnson must have stood many nights as he returned from the work of crop tending and groundbreaking.

As Oris had said, ice chunks about the size of breadbaskets bobbed at the edge of the reeds that lined the southeastern shore and extended thirty feet


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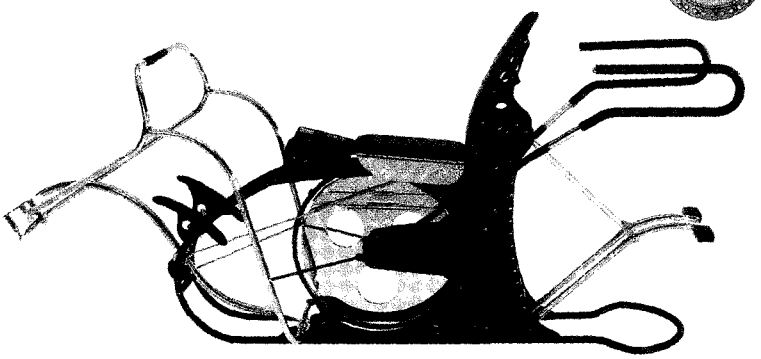

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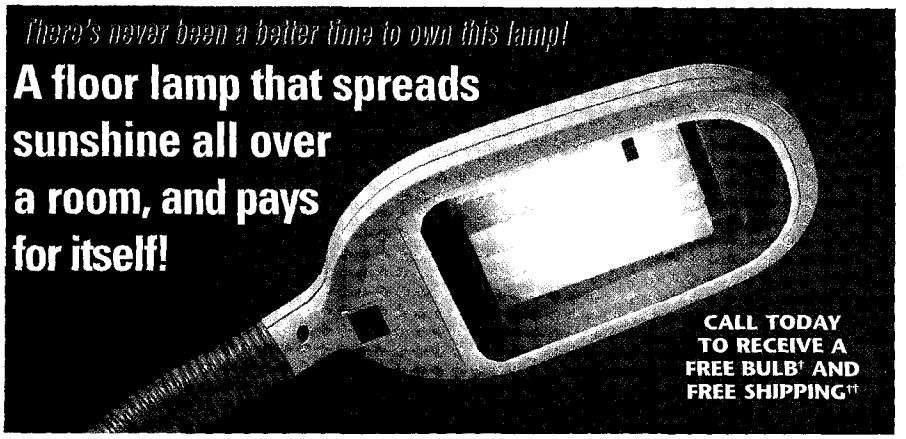

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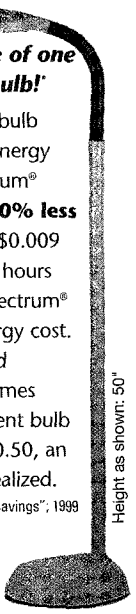


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into the lake. The thick reeds created terrific cover for duck blinds in the fall, and Leroy remembered the huge job of clearing them when he built the fishing dock. He also remembered when the lake had dried up, during the Depression, and he and his father had planted flax in it to try to make a crop where moisture might yet remain. They were blessed with an incredible stand of blooming flax late that summer, in 1936, and Leroy well remembered the waving blue field because it made the lake seem full of water again; that's how blue blooming flax is, and what a shame that no one could make money growing flax anymore, because it was one of the loveliest crops you could ever hope to grow.

The reeds and water had come back, of course, and now the ice chunks, despite their weight, could not make their way to the shore through the reeds. Leroy chambered a round into his .22 and shot at a chunk about thirty yards down the shore. The bullet made a sharp ricochet sound as it took a corner off the ice chunk, and the repeat echoed across the water. He had always been a good shot, and his eyesight was best when he looked far away, rather than up close.

Unexpectedly, Sister plunged into the water and swam headlong through the reeds toward the ice chunk Leroy had assaulted.

"No, Sister!" Leroy yelled. "Come back here, girl!"

He had not thought she would go into that freezing water. She must have believed he was shooting at ducks and thus wanted to retrieve, as was her training. The blunder was stupid on Leroy's part, and he would have to get her home and dried out now. Sister was thirteen years old, and didn't have the thick layers of beef needed to keep warm or to swim in these conditions.

Sister ignored Leroy's commands to return to shore. He said "Come!" over and over, but she only circled out in the open lake water, next to the ice chunks, as if still searching for a duck. This went on for five minutes, and even with his poor hearing and the raw wind, Leroy could hear Sister laboring badly. She barely kept her head above



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water now, as she swam in a small, regular circle like a shark, just beyond the black reeds.

Suddenly Leroy realized that Sister was scared of the reeds. They were dark and dead and thick, and she did not want to come back through them. That made no sense, since she had paddled through them to get to open water in the first place. But now she was exhausted, and confused, and thirteen years old. And freezing to death in that icy water.

Leroy could not let her drown there. He chambered another round. He knew he had to hit her in the forehead, and that would take excellent marksmanship because she was bobbing in the water. Leroy put the sight right on his old friend's forehead when she made a turn toward him, and tried to pull the trigger. But he could not do it. As a younger man he would have been able to, but not today. She could be saved, and he needed to try. He would have to get in the water and swim out to her.

He left the rifle at the top of the bank and slid down on his buttocks. An opening for the old dugout remained below; a part of the shelter had caved in over the years, but Leroy used it for protection as he took off his clothes down to his underwear. He had to have dry clothes when he came out of the water, or he might freeze to death—he knew that.

Leroy stood in the wind, shivering. He felt very small, and the lake, which usually seemed the tiniest of lakes, now seemed immense before him, with the wind blowing whitecaps on the waves. Sister had about had it, that was clear, and he heard her whining as loud as he'd ever heard her whine. Leroy knew he must move.

As he waded into the lake, he looked not at the water but across it, to the other side and the church steeple in the sky. His wife was buried in the cemetery behind that church, and he spoke half to her and half to God as the shock of the water hit him. "Be with me," Leroy asked. "Just give me some strength."

He struggled to keep his balance as he made his way through the reeds to Sister. "I'm coming, girl," Leroy said, "I'm coming now," but he was worried.


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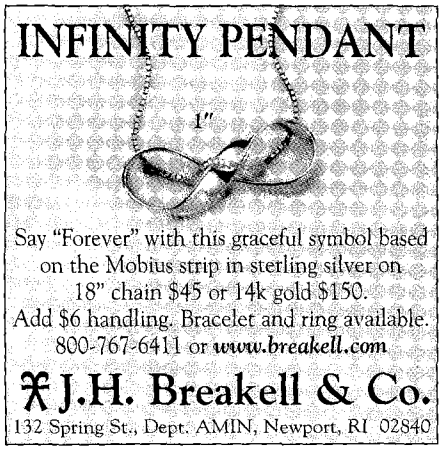


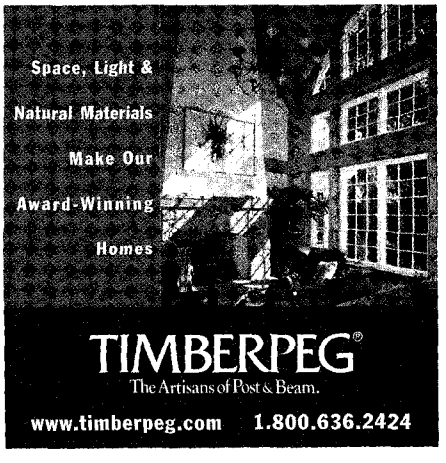


As the water rose above his groin, he realized he could not feel the bottom with his feet anymore. His troublesome feet. They felt Novocained. He was going to sink past his neck by the time he reached Sister—he could see that now. He had to hurry. He would have to swim.

He had been trying to keep his arms out of the water to save heat, but he had to lunge for Sister now, and suddenly he was in open water, swimming to catch her. His arms still had power, and he took two and then three long overhead strokes to close the gap. The frigid water made him gasp, and his lungs seemed to shrink to nothing as he treaded water to stay afloat near Sister.

In one lunge Leroy grabbed her by the tail and pulled her hindquarters to his chest. Then they both went under. The water was blindingly cold, and Leroy saw stars.

But he had reached Sister. He wrapped his arms around her trunk and swam as far as he could underwater toward shore. Sister was not fighting him, and Leroy found his footing and stood to take air. The reeds were all around him, and Leroy took three huge steps toward land, carrying Sister through the thick of the reeds. With all his energy he heaved the dog above water toward shore. Miraculously, Sister landed in enough water not to be hurt; soon she was scrambling and shaking her coat up on the shore near the dugout.

Leroy's legs failed him, and he fell forward onto his knees in four feet of water. He had trouble keeping his head above the roll of the water. All he could see was black reeds. He felt panic, sensing that he was going to pass out, but at last he made his way close enough to shore for his head to clear the water. Then he used his arms as crutches to take him slowly through the final yards to shore. He did not feel the rocks on his knees or anything else below his waist; the cold had all but paralyzed him.

Sister came over to him and tried to press into him, as she always did when she was worried. Leroy's teeth were chattering so loudly now that he couldn't even attempt to speak. His mouth would not work; it just went up and down like a puppet's jaw. He wanted to tell Sister to run home, but he couldn't. He used his arms to pull himself forward like a crab into the dugout's mouth. He flattened himself on his back, on top of his pants and coat, and the clothes felt good at the back of his neck. His skin was still sensitive. He flailed around with his right hand for the scarf so that he could quiet his chattering teeth. He managed to wrap it under his chin and over the top of his head and tighten it enough to stop his teeth from banging into each other.

Sister was licking his face, and Leroy was finally able to say, clearly, "Run home—good girl." Sister ran off, and Leroy was thankful that she had listened. He lifted his head to look at himself, and what he had feared was true. His whole body was blue.

He would not be going back to the farm this time. He would have to stay in the dugout. He knew what was happening, but he did not feel angry. He imagined how they would find him, and almost laughed to think that maybe someone would assume he had stripped off all his clothes and gone for a swim to take his mind off the pain of a bad toothache. Maybe they would do an autopsy to find out if he had a rotten tooth. That really didn't make sense, but he smiled to think it anyway.

He wanted to thank God for his life, and he did. He didn't know for sure what was next, but he saw no point in being fearful now. He would find out soon enough, or he would never know the difference. But right after that thought his conscience spoke to him, and he asked God to forgive him for his unbelief.

That was his last prayer. Leroy now felt nothing in his body; it was numb everywhere, and he couldn't move his head. Only his strong fingers could still move. He worked them past the clothes he was lying on, and wiggled his hand into the earth. The ground was hard, but he had enough energy to break through its frozen surface. How wonderful to feel again, to put even a small smear of mud or a few pebbles between his fingers. To do a little work again.

*Michael Lohre writes fiction, poetry, and music, and teaches writing at Ohio State University in Marion.*



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TRAVELS

# The Hitler Shrine

*A luxury hotel has opened next to the site of Adolf Hitler's notorious mountain retreat, the Berghof*

BY TIMOTHY W. RYBACK

When Herbert Kochta first thought about designing a five-star alpine hotel just outside the Bavarian town of Berchtesgaden, a mere 300 yards from the ruins of the Berghof, Adolf Hitler's mountain retreat, the veteran Munich architect knew he could conceptualize a hotel on a hill in either of two ways. He could work with contrast, like Walter Gropius or Frank Gehry, creating a counterpoint to the natural world. Or he could take the Frank Lloyd Wright approach, designing a building that complemented, balanced, and integrated itself into its surroundings.

Kochta first chose the Gropius solution. He wanted something "modern"—an architectural statement in glass and steel and concrete—that would dominate the cozy Bavarian hills, its glinting windows and sparkling concrete walls standing as a man-made challenge to the towering summits nearby. Kochta wanted something "self-evident," an expression of human confidence in the face of some of the most stunning natural beauty on earth.

To this end he designed a 138-room hotel with two parallel wings that curved slightly outward, providing hotel guests with maximum exposure. He then connected the wings at midpoint with a central corridor. It was a sleek design that spoke of luxury, elegance, and efficiency. But when the model was complete, it became clear that from an airplane or an adjacent peak the hotel would look like a giant "H" branded on the landscape, an uncomfortable reminder of the mountain's most infamous former resident. So Kochta adjusted his design, curving the wings inward and shifting the connecting corridor to their northern ends, thereby creating the impression of a giant horseshoe. Before opening, in March, the InterContinental Resort Berchtesgaden promoted itself as the "most impressive hotel project" in Germany, a dream setting "halfway between heaven and earth." But what about the setting's association with the man who created a very real hell on earth? The German response to this question has been awkward and uneven. During preparations for construction, numerous Nazi-era structures officially identified by the Bavarian Monument Protection Agency as "historical objects" were obliterated, along with a nineteenth-century guesthouse whose foundations dated back to the fourteenth century. At the same time, the developers harnessed the touristic magnetism of the Eagle's Nest, presented to Hitler for his fiftieth birthday. Perched dizzyingly atop a knife's-edge cliff and accessed by a perilous switchback road, the Eagle's Nest provides a breathtaking vista of the surrounding alps and a bird's-eye view of the InterContinental.

TIMM KÖLLN

Remnants of other Nazi-era structures litter the area: the "Kampfhäusl" ("Struggle Hut"), in which Hitler worked on the second half of *Mein Kampf*; the "Mooslaner tea house," to which he took his daily constitutional; and, most significant, his residence at Obersalzberg 26, the Berghof. "That is where I spent my most pleasant times, and conceived my great ideas," Hitler once claimed.

For more than half a century the remains of the Berghof have moldered in relative obscurity. The massive retaining wall, cut into the hillside, marks the perimeter of the house. Shattered brick structures and concrete foundations protrude from the forest floor. Towering trees have emerged to screen the ruins from the nearby road; they form a leafy dome that lends an almost mystical air to the site. Each year unknown numbers of *Hitlerpilger* ("Hitler pilgrims") pay quiet homage to the former Nazi leader on this neglected spot. Within the protection of the enfolding greenery, frequently in the darkness of the alpine night, they gather to construct altars, light candles, and hold vigils. The bark of the surrounding trees has been scored with Nordic runes and with the double lightning bolt of the SS.

Ignored by historians and neglected by government officials, all of whom find the site too "toxic" to deal with, the Berghof ruins have inadvertently become Germany's secret shrine to Adolf Hitler.



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Eighty-two years ago this spring Adolf Hitler, then a thirty-four-year-old political upstart, called on his fifty-five-year-old mentor, Dietrich Eckart, a rabid anti-Semite who was being sought by the Bavarian police and was in hiding in a small pension on the Obersalzberg. At the time the Obersalzberg was little more than a cluster of farmhouses and summer vacation villas in a meadow overlooking Berchtesgaden and across the valley from the imposing face of the Untersberg. Klara Schumann and Johannes Brahms had vacationed here, as had Sigmund Freud.

By his own account Hitler arrived in Berchtesgaden in April of 1923, under the pseudonym Herr Wolf. In the company of a fellow Nazi, he trudged up the mountain on foot to the pension where Dietrich Eckart was hiding, arriving late in the night. "We knock on the door," Hitler recounted years later. "'Diedi, Wolf is here!' He came out in his nightshirt with his hairy legs sticking out." Hitler spent the night in the pension, and the next morning awoke to a mountain vista unlike any he had ever seen. "It was so wonderful!" he wrote. "A view of the Untersberg! Indescribable!"

**At the Obersalzberg resort manicured lawns and flawless asphalt parking lots have replaced the crumbling Nazi-era structures. Hitler's vegetable farm is now a golf course.**

After that spring Hitler returned repeatedly to the Obersalzberg. In 1928 he rented the "Haus Wachenfeld," which he bought in 1932 with royalties from *Mein Kampf.* After the Nazis seized power, in January of 1933, Hitler undertook a major renovation of the house, adding a series of extensions, a wood-paneled library on the second floor, a bowling alley in the basement, and a giant picture window that could be lowered mechanically in order to provide a completely open view of the Untersberg. "I basically built the house around a window," Hitler later confessed. He named his refurbished residence the Berghof—"Mountain Court."

At the same time, the Obersalzberg's other residents were evacuated to make room for Hitler's closest associates, and the area gradually evolved into a retreat for the Nazi elite, with a movie theater, a kindergarten, and two SS barracks with a subterranean shooting range (to keep the daily target practice from disturbing the alpine tranquillity).

The Obersalzberg comprised three security zones. The second innermost zone was dubbed the *Führerhoheitsgebiet* ("the Führer's autonomous area"); here the Nazi elite gathered to plan and relax while their children played cowboys and Indians, watched the comings and goings of dignitaries, and splashed in Hermann Göring's swimming pool, all under the watchful eye of the SS Leibstandarte Division.

Hitler spent much of August 1939 at the Berghof, making final plans for the invasion of Poland. The 1941 assault on the Soviet Union was named Operation Barbarossa, after the great red-bearded king whose spirit was said to reside in the Untersberg. Less than two years later, following the defeats at El Alamein and Stalingrad, Hitler transformed the Obersalzberg into the alpine fortress where he had originally intended to make his final stand.

In April of 1945, just days before his suicide in Berlin, 359 Lancaster bombers devastated much of the Obersalzberg, flattening many of the buildings and seeding the area with unexploded ordnance. Although the Berghof suffered only slight damage (the kitchen and one wing were hit), Hitler ordered the retreating SS units to set the house ablaze. By the time the soldiers of the 3rd Infantry Division arrived, the Berghof was a smoldering ruin. The entire area was confiscated by the Allies, and the Obersalzberg was placed under U.S. administration.

By the early 1950s the Berghof ruins were attracting a steady stream of tourists and *Hitlerpilger,* who scrawled graffiti on what was left of the walls and searched for mementos in the rub-



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ble. Hermann Göring's former groundskeeper conducted private tours of the ruins. Fearing that the site was becoming a shrine, the Germans had it dynamited and the resulting debris hauled away. The area was then planted with trees. In 1995, when the United States and Germany celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II, the property was formally returned to the Bavarian government.

Volker Dahm, of the Munich Institute for Contemporary History, recalls, "When the Americans abandoned the Obersalzberg as part of the general troop reductions, the Bavarian government made the decision to open the area for tourism. But the question remained: Should this be for a resort hotel or historical purposes? The institute was charged with developing a concept." The Obersalzberg presented Dahm with a unique challenge. Whereas at the sites of victimization (*Opferorte*), such as Dachau, Buchenwald, and Sachsenhausen, there is a moral imperative to remember, mourn, and warn, the mandate for sites of perpetrators (*Täterorte*) is less clear, especially when it involves residential properties in an alpine meadow only indirectly associated with the horrors of war and genocide. In response to the ambiguities present in the Obersalzberg, the Bavarian government adopted only part of Dahm's proposal, which called for the creation of a museum in a Nazi-era structure, and opened the mountainside to development. In the spring of 1999 earthmoving equipment entered the Obersalzberg, obliterating everything in its path. Bulldozers leveled forests. Diesel-powered excavation machines and front loaders cut into the mountain, eradicating entire underground complexes.

For several days in the spring of 2002 I attended the destruction of the basement rooms of the "Modelhaus," a building near the Berghof that had housed Hitler's architectural models. As the demolition team, working with an excavator, crashed through, it came across not only a cache of military ordnance—ninety hand grenades, two machine guns, one infantry carbine, and more than 2,500 rounds of small-


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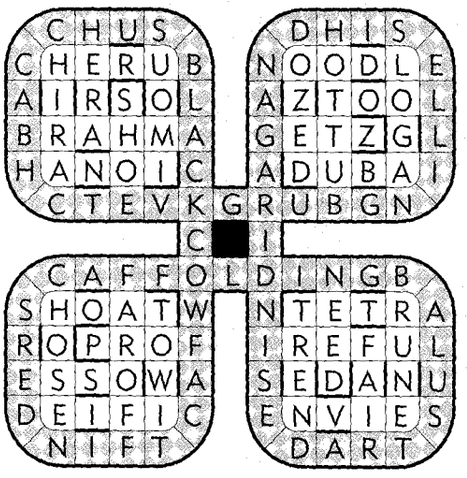
## ANSWERS TO THE MARCH PUZZLER



**"Cloverleaf"**

*The central unclued entry is* GRIDLOCK. *Cloverleaf.* a. B(LACK + C)OW b. B(AL)US + TRADE'S c. S(EL)LING d. SCA(FFO)LDING (*off* rev.) e. K(V)ETCH f. BAC + CHUS (*cab* rev. + *such* anag.) g. IN D(I)RAG + AND + HI h. BU(R)G i. FACT FINDER (anag.) *Northwest.* a. SUOMI (hidden rev.) b. H + ERA c. CHI(R + A)C d. H(AN + O)I e. S + HOE f. C(HER)UB g. BRAHMA (hidden rev.) *Northeast.* a. TOO + L b. H(OTT)UB (*tot* anag.) c. DUB + A + I d. GETZ (homophone) e. S + LOGAN f. NOODLE (anag.) g. DO + ZED *Southwest.* a. ESSO (odd letters) b. TOW + IT c. SHO(A)T d. FARO + FF e. DE(IF)IC (*dice* anag.) f. PRO + F g. CHOSEN (double def.) *Southeast.* a. B(RUN)ET b. NEE + D c. TETRA (anag.) d. FAIR (double def.) e. IREFUL (anag.) f. T + REND g. ENV(I)ES (*seven* anag.)



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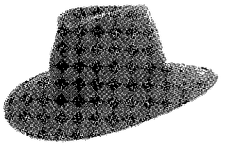

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arms ammo—but also eighteen-inch reels of 35mm celluloid, a large marble sculpture that suggested the expert hand of Joseph Thorak (Hitler's favorite sculptor), the bronze death mask of Dietrich Eckart, and an extensive wine collection. As the excavator attempted to breach the wine cellar, I could hear glass shattering and smell the rich aroma of vintage wine.

I visited the Obersalzberg in the company of Edward Linenthal, a special adviser on sensitive historical sites to the U.S. National Parks Service. Linenthal has studied preservation efforts at sites ranging from Little Bighorn to Oklahoma City. He was appalled by the devastation. "Where are the scholars?" he shouted above the din. "Where are the historians? Where are the preservationists? If this were happening in America, the preservation community would be in an uproar."

By this past summer, when the diesel fumes had cleared and the tide of destruction had receded, the Obersalzberg was transformed. Manicured lawns and flawless asphalt parking lots had replaced the dense forests and most of the crumbling Nazi-era structures. Land that had once served as Hitler's vegetable farm had been cleared of unexploded bombs in order to provide hotel guests with a safe golf course. A modern documentation center—located out of sight of the hotel—provided a history of the Obersalzberg and a glimpse into a portion of the underground bunker system. The crowning achievement, of course, was the InterContinental, built for some $65 million and promising "wellness and sport in a dream setting."

Somehow the Berghof remnants survived, a mere five-minute stroll from the InterContinental. The site itself lies unmarked and seemingly forgotten—except, of course, by the gawkers and Hitler pilgrims.

By neither clear-cutting and obliterating the ruins nor "managing" the site in a historically responsible manner, the Germans have inadvertently sanctioned a de facto shrine to their dead Nazi leader. According to Wolfgang Illner, a local official who has overseen the Obersalzberg for the past thirty-five years, the *Hitlerpilger* come not just from Germany but from across Europe and the United States, in particular from France, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

In their ongoing battle against the *Hitlerpilger*, Illner and the Bavarian government have demolished the remnant of the terrace on which Eva Braun used to sun herself, and have repeatedly obstructed efforts to tunnel into the Berghof's extant basement rooms. The tracks and counterweights of the picture window are still intact, as is the underground bowling alley. Trees scored with SS and runic inscriptions have been stripped of their bark or simply felled.

Hitler had firm ideas about the disposition of the Berghof after his death: he did not want it turned into a museum, with explanatory signs and official guides, as had been done with the Goethe house in Weimar. After visiting the historical site, Hitler said it left him with the "impression of an endlessly dead object." "When you enter the room in which he died," Hitler observed, "it is no wonder that his final words were 'More light!'"

"In my opinion, the greatest tragedy would be if a Berchtesgadener were to take over my own mountain house and explain where I used to breakfast and where I used to sit," Hitler mused, "and when someone from Saxony would warn: 'Please stay with the tour, keep on the carpet, please don't touch the objects with your hands.' If you don't have a family to whom you can leave your house, then you should just have yourself cremated in it: a worthy funeral pyre!"

After his suicide Hitler was indeed cremated, in a shallow pit outside his underground Berlin bunker. The Berghof, too, was largely reduced to ash, sparing it the indignity of the tour guides Hitler so dreaded, and leaving a place of pilgrimage for future generations of Hitler worshippers—exactly how Adolf Hitler would have wanted it.

*Timothy W. Ryback is a co-director of the Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation at the Salzburg Seminar. His forthcoming book,* The Hitler Library, *is based on his article in the May 2003* Atlantic.



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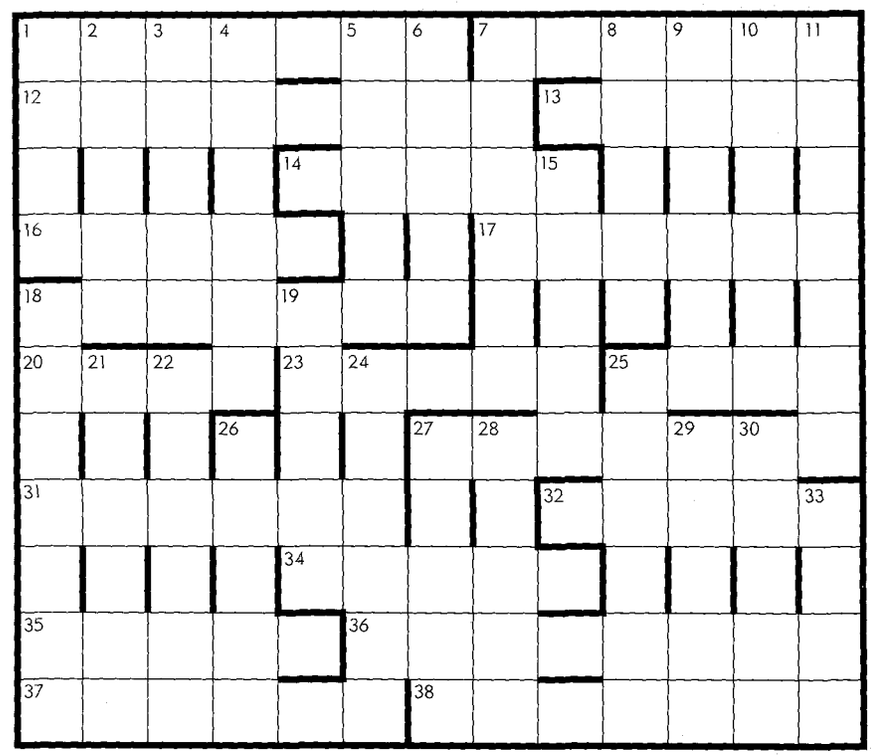
# THE PUZZLER

*by* EMILY COX *and* HENRY RATHVON

## Running the Gamut

In several squares of this diagram as many as six letters may share the space. These squares are always used by an Across answer (supplying one to three of those letters) and a Down answer (supplying the other one to three letters). In each case the multiple letters in a square can be anagrammed to form a word; solvers are encouraged to represent that word in the grid square without letters. Answers include two capitalized words.

*Last month's Puzzler solution is on page 133.*



### ACROSS

1. Entertainer laughs with Harper of Hollywood (7)
7. Inclination held by Georgia relative (6)
12. First appearance of an actor's delight (8)
13. Some tests one left in hospital areas (5)
14. Mom holds instrument in shade (7)
16. Cut around to Detroit (6)
17. Great kind of sandwich with fruit (7)
18. Get *Mad*, maintaining Neuman's face made a grimace (7)
20. Ancient key found in a metal (3-3)
23. Act theatrical in English bit (5)
25. Broadcasters of Republican farewell (6)
27. Auto service includes nothing for party (7)
31. Hold back burden (7)
32. Scheme with Constance, copping victory (7)
34. Subject matter regarding movie (5)
35. Bloomer's education in arithmetic (5)
36. Behind farm, song heard (8)
37. Snaring bad hop, go for prize (6)
38. Highly regarded race, before 500 (7)

### DOWN

1. Grope for the right words about large steer (4)
2. Tear-jerker repeatedly showing around one (5)
3. Express part of a union (5)
4. Giant, closely watched, took public transportation (9)
5. Edenic figure shown in his nakedness (5)
6. Harangue in southern religion (6)
7. Prepare for returning exam, for example (3,3)
8. Mythical guardian holding excellent debates (6)
9. Damage contained by a seaside attraction (6)
10. Trying to fathom purple cherry (8)
11. Smear, like sort of purple (7)
15. In audience, forecast is a bore (5)
18. Stud was scattering stuff in a machine shop (7)
19. To postpone, set clock back (5)
21. Pursued article caught in beam (3,5)
22. Terrible ordeal somewhere in Texas (6)
24. Number in brooding music for one voice (6)
25. Black bird that is a fledgling? (6)
26. Fork over a fork stuck in yapper (3,2)
27. Crime lark (5)
28. Housman pens "Tree Burning" (5)
29. Foundered somewhat below the surface (5)
30. Irritated about northern sawing of wood (5)
33. Made like Quasimodo and spoke aloud (6)

***Note:*** *The instructions above are for this month's puzzle only. It is assumed that you know how to decipher clues. For a complete introduction to clue-solving send an addressed, stamped long envelope to The Atlantic Puzzler, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, Mass. 02114.*



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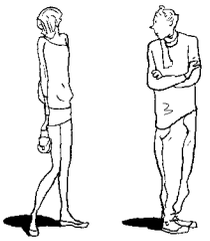

# WORD COURT

*by* BARBARA WALLRAFF

**LAWRENCE A. PESKIN, of Baltimore, writes, "I worked hard in graduate school to obtain what I thought was my graduate degree, but recently I've found myself promoted. Today I filled out a consumer survey that asked whether I had completed college or gone further, into *postgraduate* education. And my morning paper, *The Sun*, ran an article suggesting that scholars who doubted Shakespeare's authorship of his plays had been deprived of *postgraduate* degrees by skeptical English programs. I see this usage more and more often. My understanding of postgraduate work has always been that it was done after one received a Ph.D. or another terminal degree. Can I now fill in the *postgraduate* box with a clear conscience? Or do I still need to take a few more courses?"**

Yes, you may say you've done *postgraduate* work. Though I can scarcely believe it, six major contemporary American dictionaries—and the *Oxford English Dictionary*, too—claim that a *postgraduate* student can perfectly well be the same as a *graduate* student. What's more, some dictionaries consider anybody who has graduated from high school to be a *postgraduate*. This seems to have been the case ever since *postgraduate* was coined, in the United States, well over a hundred years ago.

A word like *postgraduate* is, I suppose, just the flip side of the linguistic tendency that has us *prefilling* our prescription refills, *pre-reserving* theater seats, and milling around irritably in airport waiting areas while certain passengers *preboard* the plane. But *postgraduate* is actually better established than these *pre-* words. Because *postgraduate* is so often used interchangeably with *graduate*, it would be unrealistic to insist that the two must be different and that *postgraduate* means what you and I think it does (what it should!). Why don't we switch to calling those very advanced students and courses *postdoctoral*, and leave it at that?

**YVETTE VANDERMOLEN, of Middletown, Rhode Island, writes, "I'm helping to proofread a small-town wedding guide, and I'm trying to convince the editor that *fiancés* describes not the bride and the groom but, rather, two grooms. Every dictionary and language-usage source I've consulted clearly states that *fiancé* is the groom and *fiancée* is the bride. A plural form that can cover both sexes, such as *alumni*,**

**doesn't seem to exist. Am I right to be insisting on this point?"**

It's true that the trend nowadays is in favor of gender-neutral terms: *police officer* instead of *policeman* or *policewoman*, *flight attendant* instead of *steward* or *stewardess*, *angler* instead of *fisherman* or I can't imagine what, and so on. And yet many people are opposed to viewing marriage as a gender-neutral institution. Come to think of it, I'm opposed to viewing marriage as gender-neutral. We definitely should know someone's sex and sexual orientation before choosing that person as a marriage partner. So there's a reason for *fiancé* and *fiancée* to buck the trend. Stick to your guns.

By the way, traditionalists don't regard *alumni* as gender-neutral either; they argue that one should say *alumni and alumnae*. It would be convenient if they were wrong. But anyone who cares whether the words mean the same thing in English as they do in Latin, and who recognizes the Latin ending on *alumni* as a masculine plural, will have to admit they're right.

**FREDERICK G. RODGERS, of Portland, Oregon, writes, "For a long while now I have found people using the word *do* as an alternative to a more fitting verb—a verb that provides focus and energy to what is being said. When I hear statements such as 'I often *do* French bread twice a week' and 'The mayor is not planning to *do* an investigation yet,' I automatically wonder why *bake* in the first statement and *order* in the second were not used. Is this a trend that concerns you? I am not only concerned but routinely annoyed and occasionally frustrated."**

What do you say we blame Nike? Its slogan "Just do it" has been with us for seventeen years and is still going strong. As an advertising slogan, it's brilliant, because it can mean anything the listener wants it to. *It* is of course a pronoun, and in the slogan it has no antecedent—there's nothing for it to refer to. And *do* is (among other things) the equivalent of a pronoun in the world of verbs. Thus *do it* can properly stand in for countless other predicates: just *run*, just *jump*, just *play basketball*, just *go for a walk*—just *do it*.

Outside the realm of advertising slogans, though, it sabotages communication to express ourselves in ways that can mean anything listeners want. I'm with you, then: let's just not do it.

*Do you have a language dispute? Write to Word Court in care of* The Atlantic Monthly, *77 North Washington Street, Boston, MA 02114, or send e-mail to msgrammar@theatlantic.com. All letters become the property of Word Court. Ms. Grammar is also on the Web, at www.theatlantic.com/courtrecord.*

GREG CLARKE



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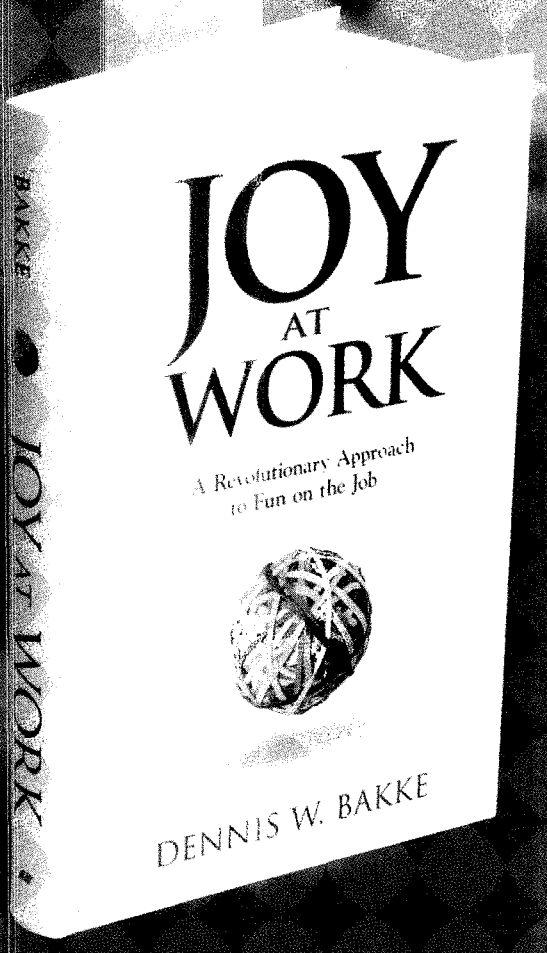


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POST MORTEM

# The Fifth Nixon

*Rose Mary Woods (1917–2005)*

BY MARK STEYN

No man is a hero to his valet. But some of us hope at least to be a hero to our secretary. And even if we're not heroic, even if we can't be Perry Mason, she'll still be Della Street—there to buck up the chief, to assure him that he's been in tight spots before and he always comes through.

Thus the White House, May 14, 1973, half an hour before midnight. Today George W. Bush would have been tucked up in bed for a couple of hours, but three decades ago Richard Nixon had things keeping him late at the office. The news wasn't good, and wasn't likely to get better. That was the view not just of political strategists but even of the leading celebrity psychic, with whom the president's secretary had recently met.

> WOODS: Jeane Dixon tells us that May and June are going to be pretty bad. June may be worse than May. But everything will turn out to be fine and to be of stout heart and all that ...
>
> NIXON: That's why we have been brought into this world.
>
> WOODS: Well, you particularly, and you'd be surprised how many people say, you know, God does bring the hardest problems to the strongest men.
>
> NIXON: That's right.

When the going gets tough, the tough know how to delegate. When he decided to resign as president, it was Rose Mary Woods whom Nixon told first, dispatching her to the residence to inform his wife and daughters. So Rose went in to see the First Lady, and told Julie and Tricia, "Your father has decided to resign," and then explained that there would be no further discussion. The president arrived for dinner and they chitchatted about ... other things. Small talk, which was never exactly Richard Nixon's big strength.

Rose had been known since the 1950s as "the fifth Nixon." But at the climactic moment of his life she seemed to be somewhat higher up in the rankings: the intimacy, the intensity, the honesty, were all between "the Boss" (as she called him) and his secretary, not between man and wife. Rose Mary Woods knew more about Richard Nixon than anybody else who ever worked with him, and she was just about the only one who never wrote a book about it. Nixon went to his grave in large part unknowable, and he has her to thank for that.

Uniquely, she was famous for eighteen and a half minutes: the "gap" in the White House tapes. She never claimed to be responsible for accidentally—or "accidentally," according to taste—erasing all eighteen minutes and twenty-eight seconds of it, but in the distillation of a defining moment the details get lost. Rose Mary Woods = gap. *The Washington Post*'s Tony Kornheiser in a memoir of his father: " 'What happened to your teeth, Dad?' I asked softly. There were gaps. Rose Mary Woods gaps."

When she died, the wags at Kornheiser's paper ran an appreciation by Hank Stuever complete with its own gap—a chunk of blank white paper in the middle of the article. To mark the twentieth anniversary of Nixon's resignation, Theatre Babylon, in Seattle, presented an evening of selected dramatic readings from the White House tapes and a playlet called *Rose Mary, That's for Remembrance*, followed by intermission—or "a gap, if you will, in the proceedings."

Rose Mary's gap swallowed the decades either side of it. Scandals are complicated things. To catch fire with a public disinclined to wade through pages of densely investigative journalism, they need an image—and Rose provided it. She said she'd taken a phone call, in the course of which she'd accidentally kept her foot on the tape machine's pedal and accidentally hit the record button; and even though the phone was a long way from the foot pedal, the explanation could have passed muster if Rose hadn't gamely essayed a visual re-enactment—her limbs extended to the limit across the length of the office, her left hand reaching backward to the phone, her right forward to the record button, one foot straining for the pedal, presumably leaving the other free to snake round the desk and over to the corner to start the Ray Conniff on the eight-track. The big stretch was too much of a stretch for the court, and for the "silent majority," which broke its silence and started guffawing loudly. John Dean called her a "stand-up woman," and she was—if only she'd stayed in that position.

"President Sadat had a belly dancer entertain President Nixon at a state dinner," Johnny Carson said. "Mr. Nixon was really impressed. He hadn't seen contortions like that since Rose Mary Woods." And even as the years passed, for an inordinate number of novels set in the seventies the secretary became a shorthand for the era. She turns up in Rick Moody's *The Ice Storm*, and Delia Ephron's *Hanging Up*, and Wally Lamb's *She's Come Undone*, and Robert Ludlum's *Apocalypse Watch* ("I figured we had one of those Rose Mary Woods things"). In Samuel Shem's *The House of God* four generations of a family gather for dinner, and Rose's turn provides fun for young and old.

> Spurred on by the news photos of Rose Mary Woods spread-eagled between the foot pedal of her tape recorder and the phone behind her as if awaiting a quick roll in the hay with Nixon, we laughed and chortled together that now, finally, Nixon was going to get his ... my brother's four-year-old daughter ... was learning to play with her toy phone by picking it up and spread-eagling herself and screaming RO-MARY REACH RO-MARY REACH ...

When a celebrity becomes a pop-culture joke, we still know enough other things about him or her to put the gag in a broader context. When a real person becomes a punchline, that's all there is—"The Rose Mary Woods Award for Convenient Technological Incompetence" (an Arianna Huffington crack). The real Rose Mary Woods returned to Sebring, Ohio, a small-town



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girl who ended her days a spinster of the parish she'd grown up in. The "devoted secretary" was an easy joke even before women's lib put the very noun in jeopardy ("Secretaries' Week" is now "Administrative Professionals' Week," which takes a bit of the zip out of the Hallmark verses). But it's one thing to be the stereotypical secretary in love with the boss, quite another to love a boss whose principal characteristic to the media and the other elites is that he's unlovely and unlovable.

She remains the only secretary to get her own *Time* magazine cover, though she looks rather severe on it. She wasn't always. Dr. John C. Lungren, who first met her on the train—the Dick Nixon Special—in the 1952 campaign, when he signed on as Dick's doc, remembered Rose as "red-haired, pretty and Irish-Catholic." She was warm and vivacious; my favorite photograph from the presidential years is not The Stretch but one of her dancing with Duke Ellington, an improbable couple hitting the floor at a White House party to celebrate Duke's seventieth birthday, with Dizzy Gillespie, Gerry Mulligan, Dave Brubeck, and other hep cats supplying the music. (Nixon's avowedly "square" White House was, in fact, less cheesy than Clinton's Lite FM programming and more confident than the Kennedys' culturally craven collect-the-set approach.)

There was a man once, a fiancé. But he died when Rose was seventeen, and thereafter she was all business. She moved to Washington, got a secretarial job with the House committee dealing with postwar reconstruction in Europe, and met a young congressman named Richard Nixon. The granddaughter of an Irish stowaway, Rose was political and ambitious, and in the absence of non-secretarial outlets for such a woman in the Washington of mid-century, Congressman Nixon became her vehicle. She was tough and plainspoken. On Tony Lake: "I've watched him. He's a weak character." To Kissinger when he threatened to quit over Al Haig's move to the White House: "For once in your life, Henry, just behave like a man"—which he never had to take from the Soviets or the Chinese. She could be tough on the Boss, too. She was the first to tell him he'd lost the 1960 presidential debate, after her parents called from Ohio to inquire if the vice-president was unwell.

Not everyone around him wanted a "fifth Nixon": they had more than enough with the first four. After victory in the 1968 election Bob Haldeman, with Nixon's consent, decided to put Rose in a basement room far from the Oval Office. "Go fuck yourself!" she told the president-elect, for once declining to delete the expletive, and thereafter refusing to speak to him until she'd been moved up closer to the action.

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She stayed close, long after everyone else was gone, and when the man she considered "the greatest president this country has ever had" set about rehabilitating himself as the greatest ex-president this country has ever had, as a geopolitical-strategic colossus, the unlikely sage had Rose Mary and time, and not much else.

The secretary who kept the secrets died with them, and left us a Richard Nixon that she helped create. Miss Woods wasn't a speechwriter. Instead she took words out of the president's mouth, and the substitutions—the "expletive deleted"s that fell as furiously as radio bleeps on a gangsta hit—came to define Nixon as much as anything Ted Sorensen wrote for Kennedy. For all the low cunning and petty thuggery of the participants, the transcripts exemplify the almost touching naiveté of the administration. Whatever their crimes, their mistake spin-wise was stenographic. Asked to transcribe the tapes, Rose approached them like any other dictation assignment: she cleaned up the stumbles and stutters and folks talking over each other, put everything into proper complete sentences, rendered "gonna" as "going to," and excised the "yeah"s and "er"s and "um"s. That's what you want in a secretary if you're dictating a letter to the chairman of the Rotary Club. But it was a disaster for the Oval Office tapes: the cool, clinical precision of the language makes Nixon and Co. sound far more conspiratorial, ruthless, and viciously forensic than the incoherent burble of the originals.

But nothing was as damaging to the president as the "expletive deleted"s. According to his British biographer, Jonathan Aitken, "the tapes were censored with Hannah Nixon in mind." "If my mother ever heard me use words like that she would roll over in her grave," Nixon said. Words like what? "Dammit" and "Christ," mostly. So Rose loyally took out everything that would have crossed the late Mrs. Nixon's profanity threshold, and as a result readers assume that every expletive deleted isn't "Goddamn" or "that bastard" but "cocksucker" or "motherfucker." Hannah Nixon's boy went down in history as one of the foulest-mouthed sons of bitches ever to open his yap, even though Rose swore she'd never heard him swear. In the end, the perfect secretary was too perfect. ▲

*Mark Steyn is a columnist for Britain's Telegraph Group, the* Chicago Sun-Times, *and other publications.*

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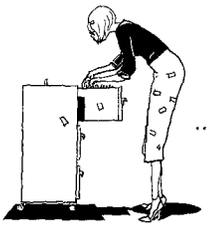

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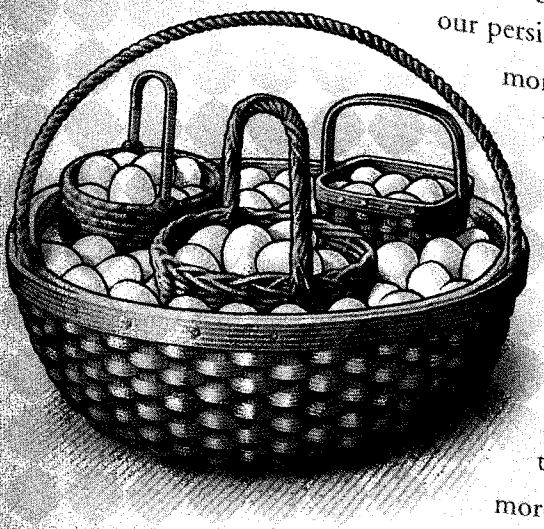

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